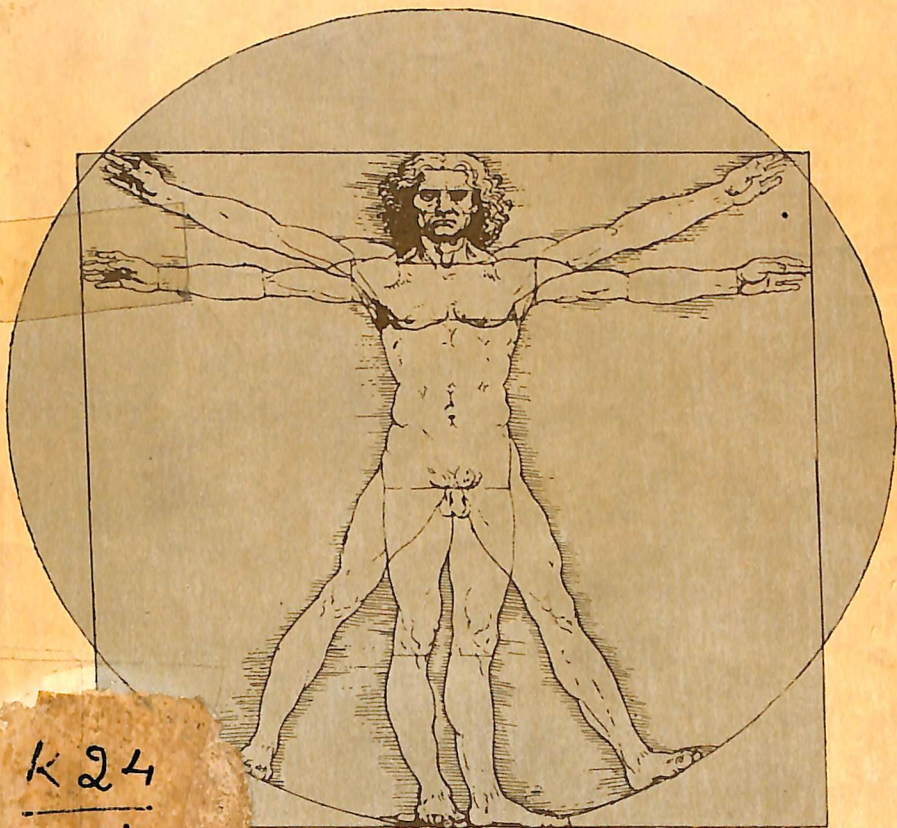


CALL TO INTEGRATION

A NEW THEOLOGY
OF RELIGIOUS LIFE



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Vadakethala F. Vineeth

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Religious Life

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TO REV. FR. CANISIUS, C.M.I.
WITH AFFECTION AND ADMIRATION

PREFACE

Man, blessed as he is with the gift of consciousness, is the reflection of God on earth. He is so in design. He has to be so in reality as well.

The Word, the supreme reflection of the Father, is consciousness par excellence and is, therefore, the fountainhead of all consciousness on earth. Human consciousness owes its existence to this Word. It is molded in and modeled after the Word. Apart from the Word human consciousness has no meaningful existence, no authenticity.

Tossed by the storm of passions and disintegrated self awareness, man's consciousness often swerves away from the path which the Word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ, has left behind Him as the visible model of the Word's consciousness on earth. But time and again man feels the call to return to his own interiority, to listen to the Word and thus to live in authenticity. He is called to be integrated, to be whole and holy.

This book is an attempt to shed some light on the process of integration taking place in man, especially in religious. The vision outlined here is the result of meditation and reflection for many years on the essence of religious life. One may find here the influence of contemporary philosophy and theology; insights from Indian genius and modern psychology. But *Call to Integration* is primarily neither a philosophical nor a psychological work. It is a theological interpretation of religious life, an earnest search into the meaning of one's unconditional dedication to God.

This inquiry into the essence of religious life is also the outcome

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of several talks and discussions which I had with my students at Dharmaram as well as with many others in various parts of India, all searching for the meaning of their life. I gratefully remember all of them.

I place on record my sincere thanks to Mr. John Goodman who carefully went through the manuscript and made many valuable suggestions. I also wish to express my gratitude to Sr. Anne, SMMI, for her generous help in typing out the manuscript. Finally, I thank every one who has helped me to discover the meaning of religious life.

V.F. Vineeth, C.M.I.

Dharmaram College
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...I

In Search of Meaning

*My religious vocation is a call. Its meaning is to be discovered ever anew. It is always discovered in the mystery of Christ's all-enfolding love. Is **integration** of myself in Christ the core of my love for Him?*

...1

THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE TODAY

It was in Oxford. I was walking through Cornmarket Street. To my surprise I found a long queue of young students, boys and girls, in front of the Town Hall. When I inquired about the reason for this one of them answered: "There is a talk on Transcendental Meditation, and to be sure of seats we are standing in the queue before time." This was not an isolated experience. There are several such movements of spirituality, most of them from India, flooding the West, especially Europe, Britain and America, the stronghold of Christianity today. What is the mystery behind this phenomenon? What do these young people seek? Does the Church fail to give them what they want?

Born and bred in lands of advanced technology and affluence, many of them do live an enjoyable life. But in spite of the comforts and conveniences their countries offer them, many of them feel dissatisfied with the situation. They look for some higher meaning of life. They have a feeling that this meaning is to be discovered in a wholeness of their own being, which now they experience as being terribly fragmented by the mobility and mechanization of the modern world. To rediscover their wholeness, to find a way to return to their interior depth, they look to the East, especially to India, a land well known in the past for its spirituality.

At the same time, within our own Christian Church, we are experiencing great threats to the religious life. The number of vocations is drastically reduced and many religious are leaving the life

of their profession. Though this problem is more acute in the West, the repercussions of such a trend are visible all over the world. In this context it becomes imperative to understand why this is happening, and to see the meaning and relevance of religious life in a new way. Has the religious life ceased to be the challenge it was for so many centuries? Has the world turned out to be so materialistic as not to need any spiritual values at all? Can the religious individual and the religious life-style still be an inspiration and challenge to the young men and women of our time?

Against the background of these questions I began to reflect on the meaning of my own religious life. What is the meaning of religious life today? What sense does it make to us? What service does it render to the world? As an answer to these questions one word came into my mind again and again. This word is *integration*. Religious people are those who are called in a special way to interior integration. The religious is meant to be an integrated man. And it seems to me that the world very much needs integrated men. Integrated men are those who have found the wholeness of their being in God who is the innermost center of every one of us. They have realized the authenticity of man and can help others to find their own authenticity. Since integrated men realize this authenticity in intense union with God, they are, as traditional language puts it, the holy men of God. Many young men and women look to the East not so much to become more holy or to acquire sanctity, because they do not give much value to these terms, but to become integrated people. However, sanctity and integration are very closely interrelated. A deeper analysis of sanctity will show us that sanctity is nothing other than integration of oneself in God.

Integration, as the word denotes, is an internal synthesis worked out in the innermost depth of our being. The word can be understood psychologically and in this case I am not sure how deep such an integration goes. Anyway, the word integration is used in this book not as a mere psychological term. Though the psychological sense of the word is well maintained, the word integration is used in a profound theological or mystical sense. By "theological or mystical" I mean that "integration" in this book, unless otherwise

mentioned, is always to be understood as man's integration in God, resulting from an intense union with God who is to be found in everyone of us as the innermost center of our own being. The use of the word "integration" will help us to realize that this union is not something external to us, but is something which takes place within us. It also denotes—here the psychological sense plays a role—the soundness and wholeness which this union brings about in ourselves.)

Man is said to be a microcosm, cosmos in miniature so to speak. In him is vegetative, sensitive and intellectual life. He may experience ardent love for spiritual values and desire for higher realizations. At the same time it is natural for him to feel the pulls of emotion in love and hatred, in sorrow and joy. A healthy balance of all the forces in him including the physical as well as the spiritual, the emotional as well as the intellectual, is what every good man likes to have. Practitioners of psychotherapeutic disciplines try to assist their clients to achieve this balance, and their attempts are of great value, especially in pathological cases. What I would like to suggest is that there is a short cut to this balanced state of being. This consists in bringing all the forces, which together comprise the entirety of our being, to the Spirit, and to surrender them to His great transforming power; to allow the Spirit Himself to work out the balance in us. This process I call integration. Of course, no integration takes place by mere lip service to the Spirit. If we are intent on it, we should allow the Spirit to work and cooperate with it so far as we are able. The Spirit is in every one of us and is the very foundation of our existence. Integration is, therefore, the integration of our total self in the Spirit that is in us. Every Christian is called to lead such a life of integration because by baptism every Christian is called to lead a life of the Spirit. But religious are those who are called to work out this integration in the Spirit in a special way, because, as chapter 6 of the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" puts it, the religious life is the flowering of the baptismal promise.¹ The call to the religious life is, therefore, a call to a life of

¹Vatican II, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*), para. 44.

integration in the Spirit. Later we shall see that this Spirit is none other than the Word of God dwelling in us as the base of our being, as the light of our consciousness.

God is in us as the base of our existence, as the light of our consciousness and as the power of our love. Wherever God operates the whole Trinity is present. So it follows that the integration achieved in and through the Spirit is really an integration in the Trinity itself. By this integration one comes to the discovery of his real existence which he has received from the eternal source of all existence (the Father), realizes the authenticity of his consciousness which is the reflection of the Word (the Son) and learns to relate himself with all things in a spirit of love and concord (the Spirit).

Integration is the response to the call of the Father, realizing and completing the work of the Son in cooperation with the Spirit. Therefore it could always be said to be integration in God, Word or Spirit. It is always to be understood as integration in the trinitarian God who is the ultimate base of our existence and all its operation. However, in this book, integration is more often presented as integration in the Word. This is because the Word, as the self-consciousness of God, is understood to be the real source and substratum of all consciousness. Integration is a process to discover the authentic consciousness of man as rooted in the Word. It is also to be remembered that, as the prologue of St. John's Gospel tells us, it was through the Word "all things were made" (1:3). This means that the Word plays a special role in laying the foundation of our being. Integration is real integration only if it reaches the innermost foundation of our being. Again, becoming flesh, the Word is set before us the perfect ideal of the integration of humanity in the divine consciousness. Moreover, it is the Word, the person par excellence, who relates Himself to humanity in a special way by His own self-emptying. This happens in the mystery of the Incarnation. But the Incarnation lays the foundation for another mystery: the mystery of an inherent and radical orientation of all human nature to the Word as being the ultimate focus of attention and the object of love. Interior integration envisaged in this book is nothing other than the enhancement of this basic orientation. This inherent orientation itself is the basic call every man has received: the

7 call to be Word-oriented, to put on Word-consciousness, to be again the Word as flesh. Integration as an interior process answers this call, opens up the flower of man's consciousness to the Word, and leads it to its full bloom when it shines forth solely and perfectly as the effulgence of the Word. Since the Word is the real and only person in Christ, integration in the Word is at the same time intimate union with Christ. The religious vocation as integration is, therefore, in the Christian understanding, a call to be transformed in Christ completely and unreservedly. Since Christ is present in us more as an expression of the Word, in this book integration is spoken of more in terms of the Word. Anyone who feels the term "Word" is too abstract to evoke affection is always free to read Christ in place of Word. In so doing no violence will be done to the real trend of the meaning in this book. "To follow Christ" was a traditional way of designating the purpose of the Christian vocation. We do not deny this. We say only that the "following" should be understood in an intensified way: the follower should really be an embodiment of Christ-consciousness, which ultimately is totally the consciousness of the Word. This Word is in every one of us as the innermost light of our own consciousness. Hence the stress on integration in the Word. We will later see how this integration is worked out through our prayer and meditation.

The Word as the innermost foundation of our being provides the basis for such an integration. Matter with what appears to be its inherent divisive tendency cannot be the basis of our integration. Integration, as we have seen above, is a process of interior synthesis. The dominant trend in the process of integration is that of unification. The word "unification," though it presupposes a sense of duality, stands for overcoming duality. Integration is the overcoming of all the expressions of duality in our nature by the awakening of a superconsciousness in us, namely the consciousness of God, the Word itself.

It is a great thing to be able to bless the world with the presence of integrated men. This is what the religious life is called to do. The religious life as a phenomenon in the Church is meant to provide the world with a supply of great integrated men. These men are the leaven of the earth and the light on the mountain. They are

others accomplished men and the sense of peace and serenity that abides in them knows no bounds. Their very presence is soothing and peace-emanating. Integrated as they are, they share with others what they really are, the gift of integration. They lead others to authentic religiosity, sound relationship with God and man and a healthy outlook on life. Such a quality and standard of living is worth any effort required to achieve it, especially in our contemporary world. Many men and women today, young and old, in India and elsewhere, are searching for the way of integration, for a greater profundity and depth in their lives. They expect help from integrated men of God who can give them the power and know-how to become integrated in God, in themselves, in their own way and at their own level.

Handing over the power of integration to another is part of the basic call to every Christian. Christ came to earth as a physician, as one who heals. He healed the sick (Mt. 4:32), gave sight to the blind (Mt. 9:30), made the lame walk (Mt. 21:14) and cast out devils from the possessed (Lk. 4:35). Healing was an inherent part of His mystery. He was Savior, the Healer par excellence. Every Christian is a healer insofar as the power of Christ abides in him.² All the external healings Christ performed were symbolic expressions of the internal and integral healing with which He wanted to replenish and renovate humanity. Interior integration, as we understand the term, is the divine healing worked out in the innermost layer of our existence as well as the fullness of life that springs from this healing.

— The fully integrated man, that is, one in whom the Word is expressed and realized in its fullness, dedicated to integration as he is, gathers up the whole world around him in his consciousness which is now totally of the Word. He is the embodiment of the divine consciousness on earth, which has the power of permeating the world

²Charismatics have renewed the interest in the healing power of Christ, and consequently that of every Christian. The movement and its enthusiastic acceptance in many quarters of the Church, taken as a whole, shows the craving of the faithful to Christ. For further information cf. Francis MacNutt, O.P., *Healing* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1974); *The Power to Heal* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1977).

and holding it together as a unified whole in itself. God often blesses the world on account of such great men. The world, that it may survive, needs to be rooted in the Word, simply because it is from the Word it came to be. All who are endowed with self-consciousness should be deeply aware of this. When this awareness is not present the effect is of turning away from the inner nature of things, of creating disruption in the very heart of creation itself. Jesus reminded us of this when He said:

I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned (Jn. 15:5-6).

The integrated man abides in the Word and the Word abides in him. Neglect of our rootedness in the Word, if allowed to expand far enough, results in the destruction of the world. But the integrated man keeps alive the rootedness of the world in the Word and becomes the saving factor of the world. As an abiding center of spiritual power and consciousness, he holds the world in the Word, and so saves it from being cut off from the Word entirely.³

It seems that the lively dialogue narrated in the Book of Genesis between God and Abraham illustrates our point considerably. Abraham pleaded with God to spare the city of Sodom from destruction. He based his plea on the existence in the city of those who were righteous. "'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? And the Lord said: 'If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.'" (Gen. 18:24, 25) Abraham pleaded further that God be merciful toward

³The Vedic man of India had some idea of the world's survival in God. They performed sacrifices that the universe might survive. Originating in the great sacrifice of *Purusha*, the God-man, the universe needed sacrifice (now performed by men on earth) for its survival. Later the stress on sacrifice was brushed aside and yogic interiorization and self-realization took its place. Both sacrifice and Yoga have one aim in common: the integration of man in God. Cf. *Rig. Veda*, X, 90.

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the city even if the number of the righteous were less than fifty. And God readily gave in until the number came down to ten. "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it" (Gen. 18:32). In the language of integration God spoke to Abraham as follows: "If there are ten integrated men in Sodom, the city remains rooted in God." It is this rootedness in the Divine, a firm ground for its own survival, that every integrated man can provide the world and in so doing render great service to the world, perhaps the greatest of all services that can be offered. The company of such men engenders a blissful state.

...2

THE MEANING AND MYSTERY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

The Primal Vision of the Integrated Man

The beginnings of mankind may perhaps ever remain shrouded in mystery. Religions which speak about the (predicamental) situation of man do not always give us a satisfactory answer to the question why this should be so. The situation is accepted as it is. Every religion tries to explain the situation in its own way. Man's state of *avidya* (ignorance) is due to beginningless karma, says Hinduism. Due to interdependent origination (*pratityasamutpada*) man finds himself again and again in the state of *dukkhah*. So thinks Buddhism. According to Christian tradition man is in the state of sorrow because of original sin. In the last analysis original sin is also a mystery. It was when the first man sinned that the world turned against him. For the first time he found himself in a totally uncomfortable situation, which we here call the predicamental situation of man.

What did God really have in view when He created the first man? What was the type of man He originally designed? If God created man and breathed His own spirit into him, then original man must have been a harmonious blend of matter and divine consciousness. Traditional theology has always understood that God created man infusing His very life into him. Creating man in His own image God installed in him His own consciousness. The first man, therefore, came to the dawn of his consciousness with the vibrations of divine

consciousness in him. The matter of which he was constructed, as he was "formed from dust" at the time of his creation, was totally informed by the divine consciousness. This is the picture of the first man which can be assumed from the presentation of the story of creation in the Bible, and as it has been traditionally understood by theologians of the Church.

But there is a different way of looking at the story of the first man. This is that the man whom God created was created in the image of another man who was himself in the mind of God from the very beginning. If that was the case, importance should be given to the primal image of that man who is in reality the first-born of all creation (Col. 1:15). St. Paul presents this man before us when he says the second Adam was prior to the first Adam (1 Cor. 15:45-77). The second Adam, though posterior in history, was anterior in divine planning. He was the first man God thought of as the ideal medium of His own self-expression.¹

This first man in whom humanity was originally conceived and on whom it remains ultimately founded is Jesus the Christ, the Word who became flesh. As the Word He was the Father's own self-reflection. As the Word made flesh, He was the Father's perfect expression made visible. The Word, the abode and the ultimate foundation of divine consciousness, the person par excellence, reveals himself in a certain otherness, in a form which is not that of God Himself. Humanity was the form first thought of as a possible medium of God's own self-expression. Word thus becomes man. Though it happened only in the fullness of time, as we who live in the process of history understand it, the image of this man was in the mind of God from beginning. As John puts it He was the Alpha of creation (Rev. 21:6). As the Word made flesh, Christ was the externalization of the divine consciousness. In Him was the perfect harmony of divinity and humanity. Every bit of His existence was charged with divine consciousness and was moved and led by that consciousness. His whole humanity was concentrated in the Word, and the Word's transforming power was and is ever present in every

¹Cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1962), pp. 105ff.

part of it. It was the highest synthesis of human nature with divine consciousness. He was the ideal of perfect integration.

It was in the image of this primal man the first Adam was created. In everything except sin he was like Jesus Christ. He shared the humanity of Christ which was the exteriorization of the Word itself. His flesh was Word-centered, as it was the abode of divine consciousness on earth. He was Word-filled and in this resembled Christ. As the spotless expression of the participated divine consciousness, he too was an ideal of integration. His own human nature, formed after that of Christ, was well integrated in his own consciousness which reflected the divine consciousness, the Word, and was rooted in it. He was beloved of God, and God saw His own image in him. He did everything according to the design of God who conceived him in His own likeness. This is the image of the first Adam we see portrayed in the Bible.

The Fathers of the Church were so impressed with the state of integration in Adam, the first man, that they understood him as being the bearer of supernatural and preternatural gifts. By the supernatural gift they meant the divine life that was in him. His whole life was characterized by the divine consciousness which had been shared with him. By the preternatural gift they meant especially the gift of immortality. The implied suggestion is that the first man had a body, which being perfectly integrated in the spirit, could coexist with the spirit without becoming disintegrated. Immortality meant the power and influence of the spirit acting on and from within matter and the high degree of integration of matter in spirit, such matter, when so integrated, sharing with God Himself infinite extension in time. Far from trying to establish whether such a man really existed in paradise or not, I want only to draw our attention to the truth that the Christian image of the first man was always that of an integrated man, of a human nature well established in and sustained by divine consciousness. This state is again here presented as the ideal for which we have to strive. The striving will be rewarded in due time with resurrection, when the gift of immortality again embraces us as the result of the reintegration of matter in spirit.

Sin, the Basic Disintegration

Notwithstanding the image of integrated first man, Christianity has always accepted the fact of existential disintegration. Today we find ourselves in an existential condition of disintegration wherein we feel ourselves to be separated from our own divine center. We see and experience conflicts within us and in others. Good and bad desires and decisions surge, rise and submerge within us with little control on our part. We are neither immortal nor indestructible. The integrated, immortal man suggested in the Paradise story and enhanced by the resurrection of Christ is still only the ideal we strive after and hope for; it is not yet the reality of our present existence. Existentially we are alienated from this ideal state of being.

Traditionally this state of alienation has been called the state of original sin. The doctrine of original sin may still remain a matter of mystery. Phenomenologically we find the essence of original sin in a kind of estrangement. We are estranged from our own authentic nature. This estrangement consists in a turning away from God, a turning in upon oneself, and a turning to the pleasures of this world. Paul Tillich calls these aspects of our personalities unfaith, pride (*hubris*) and concupiscence respectively.² A conscious turning away from God and the choosing of himself, instead of choosing God, is the estrangement associated with the concept of sin, and as such is considered to be the essence of the original sin of Adam, the first man.

If man was originally conceived as the image of God and the living expression of the Word, his interiority should ultimately be discovered in God Himself who is in man. Any turning away from God, therefore, will be in reality a turning away from himself, from his own authenticity. Sin as a turning away from God becomes a turning away from man himself, from his own authenticity, and thus brings within himself internal division and disintegration. Sin is the cause of the basic disintegration in man.

Contemporary philosophers, especially the existential philosophers of the West, have brought to light many aspects of this disin-

²Cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), 2:51-66.

tegration in man. Existentialists see man as inauthentic, alienated from his own true nature and "fallen" to the world.³ As a result of this alienation man is aware of division within himself. He experiences a sense of something like nothingness within himself. And he is subject to anxiety which arises from the threat of non-being.⁴ Though many of the existentialists do not bring God into their system, their analysis of man helps us understand the true nature of man and the effects of disintegration in him. The disintegrated man, as the existentialists present him, is in a dilemma, in a constant tension of an either-or state⁵ of losing himself altogether or discovering himself anew. Separated from his own interiority and thus from his own true nature and from humanity at large, he experiences loneliness, anxiety, despair and even the call to suicide. But whisperings of his central authenticity also rise from within him. He is invited to return to his own authenticity by his own free decision and self-discovery. Marvelous is the possibility man sees within himself, the great possibility of becoming authentic and fully realized. The call to realization is actually a call for his own reintegration.

The Religious and the Reintegration of Man

The religious are those who take this challenge seriously and set their life apart for it. With intense desire and unwavering decision they give themselves totally to the working out of this high ideal of integration within themselves. As we have already seen above, the religious see this integration in and through God, who is the ultimate substratum of their own foundation and the inner core of their own interiority. It is to the credit of all the great religions of the world that they have produced men of such decision and dedi-

³Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (London: SCM, 1962), pp. 191ff. Cf. also Vineeth (Vadakethala), *The Discovery of Being* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1970), pp. 56-64.

⁴Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (London: Collins, 1952), p. 55.

⁵"*Either or*" is the title of Kierkegaard's famous work. It was published in 1843 under the pseudonym of Victor Eremita. This book, divided into two parts as it contains the papers of two men whose interests vary, presents the tension of life between the aesthetic and the ethical man.

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cation, interiority and integration. Many such great men have come from religious orders, congregations and associations. Christianity, especially Catholicism, with its strong network of religious life, is in a privileged position to provide the world with such great men. To enable this the Church may have to rediscover the original meaning of religious life, to save it from the present effects of institutionalism, and to rearticulate it to the people of our time.

The Threefold Dimension of Religious Life

Whatever form the religious life may assume, theologically it will always be related to the mystery of incarnation, of the Church and of the final consummation of all in Christ. Incarnation, ecclesiology and eschatology are related to the Christian ideal of religious life as its beginning, middle and end. The Christian ideal of religious life is based on the ideal of the incarnation of Christ wherein we have the highest degree of integration of matter in spirit, of humanity in divinity. The Christian religious life always looks to Christ for its inspiration. Christ is considered to be the ideal religious, always seeking and fulfilling the will of the Father, and thus becoming the presence of the Father's good pleasure (grace) on earth. The religious follows Christ, the great ideal of integration. Christ's ideology becomes his ideology: Christ's way of thinking and acting becomes his own way of thinking and acting. Christ's ideology, as well as His ways of thinking and acting, is presented to us in the Gospels. So the Christian religious reads and meditates on the Gospels with the utmost devotion and attention. The Gospels and the whole New Testament, as they contain the seminal expressions of Christian thinking, become the constitution par excellence of the religious.⁶ Accordingly the religious tries to become assimilated with the Gospel ideology. All other constitutions are subordinated to this one great constitution, by the terms of which all religious set their lives, and the others are in no way expected or allowed to contradict the Gospel ideology. In any cases of

⁶Leon-Joseph (Cardinal) Suenens, *The Nun in the World* (London: Burns and Oates, 1962), pp. 67ff.

conflict, the claim of preference is naturally to the Gospel ideology, the most fundamental constitution of all Christian religious. The magnitude and the inexhaustibility of the Gospel ideal compel us to assimilate it part by part. Each founder or foundress of a community lays stress on one or another aspect of the Gospel ideal, and evolves a life-style around it. This explains to a certain extent the varieties of the religious congregations within the Church. The life-style thus evolved is naturally always subordinated to the inspiring ideal of the Gospel of which it is only the expression. A long tradition of a particular life-style may produce confusion in the minds of the followers of the ideal, especially when the sacrifice of that life-style for the sake of the ideal is refused. The ideal should always be transparently clear when expressed in the life-style. But the life-style evolved in one period of history may be unsuitable to express the same ideology in a later period. A continuing revision and renewal of ideology and life-style is a necessity for all congregations. The constant return to the Christ of the Gospel as envisaged by the founder of a congregation is the sum and substance of all renewal. As the Gospel of Christ is the basic constitution of the religious, the Christ of the Gospel is his greatest ideal. Thus the Christian religious life is centered on incarnation.

The Incarnation also reminds us of the kenosis, the self-emptying of the Word, through the action of which the Word became flesh. The integration in Jesus Christ is all the more intense because the flesh of Jesus is the result of the self-emptying of the Word. In a reverse order, the religious empties himself so that his own flesh may now become the abode of the Word: a flesh charged with the Word's own consciousness and expressiveness. To this end he meditates on Jesus Christ, the Word who has become flesh for his sake.⁷

The Ecclesial Dimension

The religious who looks toward Christ to discover the origin and the meaning of the life he has chosen has to realize his ideal in and

⁷This idea is further developed in the section on prayer. See Chapters 8 and 9.

through the Church. The Church is the continuation of Christ on earth. Jesus Christ, as the expression of the invisible Word in visible flesh, is the primordial Sacrament⁸ and the primary source of all integration between humanity and divinity. The Church continues this sacramental life of Christ through her existence as the visible manifestation of the invisible presence of Christ on earth. By offering herself daily through the Eucharistic sacrifice she readily manifests her intense desire of belonging to Christ. The Eucharist symbolizes also the great process of her transformation into Christ. As the bread and wine symbolizing her own self-offering become the body and blood of Christ, she becomes the transformed consciousness of Christ on earth. The Church is, therefore, a great continuing process of the realization of Christ on earth. The religious who has given himself for the realization of Christ on earth becomes part and parcel of this great ecclesial process of Christ-realization. He becomes Christlike in and through the Church. His dedication to Christ in reality and for all practical purposes becomes a dedication to the service of the Church. The Church is the authentic representation of Christ-consciousness on earth which in the final analysis includes all men of good will, and all that is true and authentic within humanity. The ecclesial dimension of the religious is, therefore, not restricted to the visible Church of the *Magisterium*, but open to the whole of humanity, to all who participate in the genuine design of man originally visualized in and for Christ. In other words, the religious is open to all who are the continuation of Christ's humanity on earth. From the prompting of an inner necessity his life becomes a life of "mission" to the people, a life of apostolic service to all men. The religious is essentially apostolic and works out the process of Christ-realization in himself and in the world around him.

The ecclesial dimension of the religious places him in a living tension between office (or *magisterium*) and charism within the Church.⁹ Since the Church is the continuation of Christ's con-

⁸Cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

⁹V.F. Vineeth (Vadakethala), "Institution and Charism," *In Christo*, vol. 6 (1968), pp. 28ff.

consciousness on earth, she officially shows her concern to keep the identity of this consciousness spotless and beyond reproach. But as a charismatic movement within the Church the religious life always struggles to unveil new dimensions of this consciousness. Great religious leaders and founders of orders and congregations have appeared in the Church at the time of dire need and have opened up new paths in the life of the Church. Initially there has often been considerable tension between the new turn given to the Church by its timely charismatic leaders and the office of the Church. This healthy tension between officialdom and the initiative of the religious when it occurs should be accepted for what it is — as a sign of dynamic life within the Church, and as being beneficial to both parties. Orthodoxy and authenticity of truth is a necessity for all religious life; newness and growth in life is a necessity for the official Church. Often the charism of a founder falls into a dead life-style soon after his death. Though we cannot expect the same degree of charism and divinely characterized initiative from everyone, it should be remembered that our identity with the original charism of a founder and even with Christ is not a dead identity but one full of vigor and life, always evolving and expressing that identity. The ecclesial dimension of the religious reminds him of the key role he plays in the great process of the cosmic integration of everything in Christ.

The Eschatological Dimension

The religious who assists in the process of the cosmic integration of everything in Christ, is at the same time a symbol of the expected fulfilment of that process. He lives here on earth fundamentally as a man of the future, transcending all that is given to him and proclaiming what is yet to come. What is yet to come is the final integration of all in that One in and for whom the whole universe has been originally planned. Eschatology is nothing but the fulfilment of integration in its widest or cosmic sense, when the Word Himself becomes the experienced inner life of the whole cosmos. Giving himself totally to the Word, the religious anticipates this eschatological fulfilment and becomes the foretaste and prototype of the life to come.

The religious turns to Christ, the Word Incarnate, to see the original inspiration of his vocation in the Church; and to the Word operative in the world, to settle his actual life-style. He turns to the Parousia, the Word yet to come, for the total vision of the process of integration in which he is engaged. Inasmuch as all these dimensions, the incarnational, the ecclesial and the eschatological contain mystery, his religious vocation is also mystery-bound.

The Mystery of Religious Vocation

Man as a rational being is or should be led by reason. He is expected to make decisions after mature thinking and careful consideration of the pros and cons of a given situation. Reason plays an important role in all his decision-making. However, it is only fair to admit that reason also has its limitations in man. Truth is far more than what human reason can conceive, or any type of communication convey. Since truth in its ultimacy transcends reason, in a profound confrontation with truth man's reason may find itself to be helpless, yet he may still be moved and led by the incomprehensible light of that very truth. This happens because truth refuses to limit itself exclusively to the way of human thinking, yet wants to communicate to man its quality. This is especially true with regard to the religious experience of man. The deeper such experience goes, the more it becomes a direct encounter of truth. Hence the authentic religious experience of man, though it may be articulated for the sake of communication in a reasonable framework, actually transcends all such intellectual frameworks and points to the essentially ineffable character of truth. Truth does not deny reason because it takes reason along with it, but makes reason aware of its own limitation and the transcendence of truth. This is why in the realm of religion the acceptance of truth becomes ultimately a matter of faith rather than the conclusion of a logical philosophical syllogism. This faith, as a fundamental attitude of commitment arising from a man's own profound religious experience, contains the whole of his being including reason. Faith, therefore, is not sheer irrationality and may very well go with a rational substructure but it essentially transcends it.

Many of man's most vital decisions are made in faith. A young man choosing a wife as a lifelong companion does so in faith. Though he might have known her for several years there are still many dimensions in her yet to be known. But the decision is considered to be great because it is the total acceptance of and commitment to a person. Similarly, a man who takes the prescribed medicine for his cure does so in faith. Though the medicine has been tested and verified in several cases, its effect in his own body is certainly not verified before he takes it. There is a sort of trust and faith in that too. Man who is rational lives not by reason alone, but also by faith and trust.

The decision to spend one's whole lifetime as a religious is obviously a vital one, and one of the most important decisions that can be made. This is a decision made in response to a call, which this writer understands as a call to integration. The word "call" denotes the otherness of the person who calls the religious. The decision as being the answer to the call is a decision of complete commitment to that person. The call, however, can also be understood as emerging from within the religious himself. It is the awakening of a new awareness in his own consciousness, the awakening of the Word-awareness within himself. The Word as God and at the same time the foundation of the being of the religious is both within himself and beyond himself. A decision to commit himself totally to the call of the Word is a decision of the utmost importance when it is made in faith, in the very Word who calls.

The Word as consciousness communicates with man through reason, but as absolute consciousness it transcends his power of reasoning and leaves him in amazing darkness. Yet it remains a fascinating experience and man makes his decision in faith and complete trust in the One who calls him.

Jesus Christ, as the Word who became flesh, is a call to every man to come to his own authenticity. The doctrine of the Incarnation is a mystery of Christian faith. The visible expression of the invisible God remains a mystery because of the inexhaustibility of the Word and of the limitations of human understanding. The religious who decides for himself that he shall become Christlike, to be charged with the Christ-consciousness, is led to that decision by his

faith in Christ. The intensity and interior depth of this commitment is in direct proportion to the intensity and interiority of his commitment to the Christ-event. In the same way it is with a sense of mystery that he accepts the presence of Christ in the Church of which he becomes a part and then looks forward to the second coming of Christ, which event alone will be the crowning experience of the great integration process to which he has given himself. Apart from these three mystery-bound dimensions of the full Christ, he cannot understand the full meaning of his own religious vocation. For the Christian religious his vocation is deeply rooted in the mystery of Christ, the Church and eschatology.

Mystery, however, does not necessarily denote lack of light and uncertainty of mind.¹⁰ Rather it is that mystery is experienced because of the superluminosity of truth directly encountered and the darkening of mind it brings about. Truth encountered in mystery reminds man of the ineffability of truth and of the incapacity of man to comprehend truth. The sense of humility is the natural result of such a profound religious experience. Truth encountered in mystery, unlike truths discovered elsewhere, is an acceptance of and commitment to the truth that has been encountered. Religious vocation is inevitably such an encounter, an unwavering decision to give oneself to God, who is Himself the truth encountered, and to integrate one's total self in the Word, in the consciousness of God.

Participating in the mystery of Christ in and through the Church, the religious himself becomes the symbolic presence of the mystery of Christ on earth. The religious in himself is a symbol, not a sign.¹¹ In the strict sense of the word a symbol is different from a sign. A sign does not necessarily contain what it signifies; its function is that of only pointing a direction. A red flag is a sign of danger in the vicinity, but it does not contain danger within itself; it only points to the danger. A symbol on the contrary contains what it signifies. For example a mother kisses her baby with affection.

¹⁰Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being* (London: Harvill Press, 1950), pp. 197ff.

¹¹Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 53ff.

Here the mother's kiss is at the same time a sign and a symbol. As a means of manifesting her love it has a sign value. But a kiss is far from being a mere sign because it contains and conveys the very love the mother wants to manifest. The kiss is a genuine symbol of love in this case. As a symbol the religious contains within himself and conveys to others the mysteries of faith he stands for. Giving himself to complete integration in the Word he relives the mystery of incarnation, revives the work of the Spirit in the Church, and anticipates the final consummation of all in Christ. He becomes a symbol of Christ's incarnational presence on earth, of consciousness in the Church, and of the anticipated eschatology.

The danger and the doom of religious life is to be discerned when the religious ceases to be the symbol of what he proclaims and becomes only a sign. In everything, with the exception of religion only, a sign may be effective. But in religion a sign which at the same time is not a symbol is hypocrisy incarnated; it is a contradiction in terms and therefore is ultimately ineffective or even counterproductive. As a living symbol the religious contains in his own being the mystery of Christ in a very special way; he conveys and communicates this mystery to the whole world, surrendering himself totally and unconditionally to that very mystery which ultimately is the mystery of the Word becoming flesh. The three vows taken by a religious emerge from this unconditional surrendering.

...II

The Vows

The religious surrenders to the Word his very being, his flesh, his humanity, what he most intimately is. This unconditional offering of his flesh to the Word is what we understand as chastity. His flesh, however, is situated in the world; man finds himself as a being in the world. His offering of the self is complete only when he offers with it the world which forms his larger self, the world in which he finds himself. This surrendering of the world, of all that he has together with all that he is, is the sum and substance of the vow of poverty. When he has surrendered his being as well as his having, his flesh as well as the world of his flesh, his main concern is to listen to the Word of God and to realize it meticulously in his being and in his having, in all that he is and in all that he has. This concern for realizing the Word in all his life, in his being as well as his having, is the essence of his obedience. In the following chapters we shall analyze these three basic orientations which, emerging from the absolute self-surrender of the religious, become the foundation for the three vows—chastity, poverty and obedience.

...3

CELIBACY AS PERSONAL INTEGRATION AND THE CALL TO UNIVERSAL LOVE

Religious life as a way of life aiming toward integration is in reality a call to a chaste and celibate love of all. No one and nothing is excluded from this all-embracing love. Far from depriving man of love, and the expression and experience of love, celibacy places him in the heart of a loving and lovable universe. There is one notable difference between this love and what usually passes for love. The whirlpool of love in which he finds himself is in all its expressions divinely characterized. Integrated in the Word, all his relationships are now transformed by the power of the Word, the divine consciousness itself. Celibacy plays a key role in the all-pervading transformation of the world of love experienced by the religious.

Celibacy as Personal Integration in the Word

The Christian religious life is molded according to the ideal of incarnation expressed in its fullness by the living Christ. The process of integration which the religious has accepted for himself is the process of actualizing in this world the ideal of incarnation which exists as the substratum of what is human in every man. Celibacy when seen as the unconditional surrender of one's flesh to the Word is a decisive expression of the ideal of integration one has chosen.

When God created man He created him in His own image. He gave man His own consciousness and saw in him His own reflection. The first man, as we have seen, was originally designed as an integrated man. He was expected to be motivated by the divine consciousness in which he participated. In everything the first man resembled God, he was God's own lovely reflection. But this exalted position of mankind was lost when the first man sinned. Man then became disintegrated and his own flesh became alienated from his divine spirit, from the being of God Himself. His consciousness was then alienated from its own source, from the divine consciousness. Having now become split in himself, severed from his own authenticity, he began and still continues to lead a miserable life.

In the fullness of time God Himself appeared on earth in human form. This time it was the Word, the divine consciousness itself, which became embodied as the human form. The Word became a man and we call this man Jesus the Christ. As the Word made flesh, the man Jesus was the living expression of the Word and as such remained perfectly integrated in the Word. He was the spotless reflection of God the Father. God Himself was pleased with Jesus and in a declaration significant for all humanity proclaimed: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 12:18). As the perfect image of the Father, the Son reminded mankind of their original design and authentic nature. He invited all men to participate in His authenticity. Men and women, young and old, masters and slaves, all were called. Christianity began on earth as a movement toward authentic self-realization as envisaged by God, and idealized in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Christian religious is one who takes up the ideal of self-realization in Christ in a special way. He does this by absolute surrender of his own self to the Word, to the person who is Christ. This form of surrender begins with the unconditional offering of one's own flesh to Christ. The flesh, as understood in the Bible, is our own human nature which is weak and fragile, subject to existential threats, to anguish and to death. It is this human nature that is most fundamental in every one of us, it is what we really are at the deepest level of our being. In the surrendering of his flesh the Word the religious surrenders what is most precious and vital to

him, that which is his very being. Quite naturally, the surrendering of himself to the Word begins with the surrendering of his flesh. The vow of celibacy is nothing other than this unconditional and total surrendering of one's flesh, one's own human nature, to the Word.

The religious surrenders his flesh to the Word, so that the Word and the Word alone may become the living experiential principle in all its flesh when manifested as the totality of human nature. He consciously submits his flesh to the Word so that the Word, as the divine consciousness, may overpower his own human consciousness and become the sole acting principle in his whole life. In doing so he restores the original design of man in himself. Flesh was originally designed as the outward expression of the Word and was meant to be totally integrated in the Word. Thus the religious lays the foundation for restoring in himself what was a failure in the first Adam and a success in the second: the perfect and unrestricted flow of divine consciousness in human life. When this is perfectly done the religious becomes the living example of what mankind as a whole will ultimately be.

Sin, in whatever way we understand it, brought about an estrangement of the flesh from the divine consciousness.¹ The estranged flesh developed its own ego-consciousness. Ego-consciousness in contrast to Word-consciousness is the center of human craving for power, and of pride and concupiscence. By surrendering his flesh to the Word, the religious surrenders his estranged ego-consciousness to the Word along with the flesh and paves the way for the awakening and strengthening of a new consciousness in himself, namely the Word-consciousness or the consciousness of God. Consecrated celibacy promises and proclaims the power and influence of of this newly awakened consciousness in humanity.

Celibacy and the Experience of the Divine

When seen historically celibacy is not a post-Christian phenomenon only. Monks and nuns of various religious orders who pro-

¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), 2:51ff.

fessed the vow of chastity lived before the time of Christ. Buddhism and Jainism, for example, are religions especially noted for the monastic life and for the rigorous observation of vows. Whenever there was intense religious experience there appeared dedicated people who wanted to express this experience as a way of life. This accounts for the origin of new religions, sects, denominations and the like. In some at least the yearning for new religious experience and for the effect of a newly awakened consciousness became so intense that they set their hearts on nothing else. They gave themselves completely for the fulfilment of this divine experience and the peace and serenity emerging from it. They even refused marriage and followed the paths of hermit, sage or monk so they could cherish the newly awakened consciousness in themselves and bring it to its full flowering. They preferred to remain celibate for life for the sake of the divine experience, the enrapturing taste of which they had once known. Thus it seems that chastity arose in this world from the foundation of intense religious experience.

In Christianity also, perfect celibacy is meaningful only when it is embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed was and is a newly awakened consciousness in humanity, namely the Christ-consciousness of man. To achieve this consciousness any sacrifice is worthwhile — to leave father and mother, brothers and sisters or even a lifetime partner whom one loves. The state of chastity is meaningful only when there is a rich divine current in a man which overwhelmingly attracts him, elevates and enraptures him. Though he may be eventually tempted to the contrary, his basic satisfaction in the divine should remain unaltered and certain. To think of celibacy as a state of life without a powerful religious experience to sustain and support it is not inspiring, and such a state may be found to be quite meaningless. The sustaining divine experience is, therefore, fundamental to the decision of a life of consecrated celibacy.

The danger in the practice of celibacy lies in the possibility of its becoming unduly institutionalized. The religions and the religious communities which have marvelously opened the path of celibacy as an outward expression of an intense inward experience have often fallen prey to the temptation of institutionalizing the practice

of voluntary celibacy. We do not mean that any kind of structured life designed for celibates is necessarily institutionalization with its undesirable effects. The institutions which foster religious vocations are no doubt well aware of the need for intense religious experience which their candidates should have. In early Buddhism, Arhathood which was supposed to be the gateway to *nirvana* was restricted to monks. Naturally the Buddhist *viharas* (ashrams) were overcrowded with monks.²

A real religious experience, when institutionalized, may work as a system, but it is likely to lose its original strength and flavor. This unhappy development may be encountered in the Christian religious life. The Christian congregations take their candidates for religious life in the hope that they may come in time to the fullness of religious experience, and that this experience may enable them to lead a life of perfect celibacy. The only justification for recruiting candidates at a young age is that they have begun to show a taste for such a life and thus seem called to it. But if the candidate fails to reach such a depth of religious experience and divine union intended and hoped for by his superiors, his life of celibacy is going to be miserable. Such a person must have sufficient courage to quit a style of life which is not meant for him. If not, he may find himself trapped as it were in a situation which he is unable to rectify or give up.

The state of celibacy is not to be considered as an irrevocable legal contract, rather it should be seen as a free and sublime state of existence to which one has been called. When experienced in this way the religious remains permanently committed to the state and ideal of celibacy. It is a commitment which is permanently alive as well as one enhanced with continued experience of the divine. Hence the necessity of fostering authentic religious experience in every candidate for the monastic life is extremely important. Unfortunately, it may happen that candidates are cultured by their environments to a level of an average spirituality only, with a certain measure of external rituals, pious practices and practical

²Edward Conze, *Buddhism Its Essence and Development* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1959), p. 53.

skills. Their growth in religious experience, their profundity of Christian vision and their strength of commitment may neither be well developed nor correctly evaluated by those recruiting them. Celibacy as a decision of perpetual commitment certainly demands an intense spiritual experience which is far beyond the average level of spirituality. Religious institutions which foster vocations and cater for candidates should develop methods of enabling them to discern the growth of their candidates in the experience of the divine.

The state of consecrated celibacy should be reserved only for those who are really called to it. It is God who calls such people and to them God also gives the sustaining inner experience and the growth in divine consciousness which in effect quenches the human thirst for complementarity and fulfilment by another. This brings us to the problem of human complementarity in the sexual area of life.

Human Complementarity

When the Word designed humanity He designed it as both male and female. After his creation Adam was placed in the garden of Eden. But God thought it was not good for Adam to be alone and so created Eve as his companion. Adam, we may suppose, was extremely pleased when he saw his God-created companion. With joy and satisfaction he exclaimed: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). Adam saw himself in Eve and she saw her counterpart in him. Each recognized the possibility of a greater union with the other than was possible with any other being in Paradise. Each for the other was both the beloved spouse and a human companion.

Adam and Eve were instinctively drawn together because each could see in the other his own image, because they both shared the primal image of Christ in whom humanity was originally planned. This participation in the visible "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) made them privileged beings on Earth, characterized by consciousness and openness. They were open each to the other in a special way through the active nature of consciousness which can fuse itself with other expressions of consciousness. In this way every man is a companion to every other man and woman. All human re-

lationships, including that of husband and wife, are founded on this gift of consciousness, openness and mutual receptivity.

Human consciousness is characterized by the quality of openness. By consciousness we understand here the gift of self-awareness given by God to man when man was created. But man's self-awareness is not inherently closed. Closed self-awareness, often known as ego-awareness or egoism, is ultimately a crude form of selfishness, but the true self-awareness of man is not so. In true self-awareness each man is open to every other, ready to be fused with the consciousness of the other. One discovers himself in the other and the other in himself. This mutual self-discovery brings a state of bliss to the participants and is theologically founded on the fact that both are visible images of the invisible God. Man is, therefore, essentially open and receptive to the other. The presence of the other is a very important factor in the development of man. Man discovers himself in the presence of the other. A man sitting alone in a room becomes more aware of himself, the moment another person enters the room. He discovers his own presence in the presence of the other. The presence of the other always helps man to discover himself in depth, to be aware of himself in contrast with the other. In this sense it is said in contemporary philosophy there is no I without a thou;³ every I is constituted as "I" only in the presence of "thou." It is only in relationship with a "thou" that "I" can really be understood. Since everyone understands himself as "I" it is to be accepted that every one of us takes our relationship to the "thou" for granted. We have already sharpened our self-awareness very much by constant encounter with the "thous" in this world.

It is also a human experience to feel happy in the presence of the beloved. The sharpening of self-awareness which can be fear or anxiety in the presence of a stranger (a stranger is one whom we suspect to be of closed self-awareness, at least in regard to us) can be happiness in the presence of a friend. It becomes an experience of extreme bliss when the friendship is intimate. Intimacy means only the actual awareness of human openness to the other. It is the conscious realization of and receptivity to the openness of I to thou.

³Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

Because they are mutually open by nature, each accepts the other, and they allow themselves to be fused together. This fusion takes place primarily at the level of consciousness.

The human consciousness, open as it is to the other, is meant to be blissful when it is in union with the consciousness of the other. Only in this union of consciousness will man find himself in a state of bliss. Happiness is always the outcome of union. Every sense has its satisfaction and fulfilment when in union with its appropriate object. Thus, the sense of taste feels happy when it can unite itself with delicious food, eyes feel happy when they perceive beautiful colors and forms. The finite human consciousness feels happy when it can fuse with another consciousness. The state of consciousness arising from this mutual fusion we call love.

What takes place in real love is a "becoming-one" process arising from the fusion of consciousness. Love, unlike fear, for example, enhances the being of an individual and leads that being toward its full flowering. This is the reason why, in the presence of the beloved, one feels happy and fulfilled. The self-awareness, devoid of fear, now begins to forget itself, and in the presence of the other melts into the consciousness of the other. This melting of the one in the other, this fusion of consciousness, this becoming-one process is necessary for every human being. Finite consciousness is happy only in this loving fusion. It is a necessity because consciousness by its very nature is open to the consciousness of the other.

The human complementarity which is founded on consciousness is enhanced by a psychosomatic substructure in which human consciousness is realized. We call this sex. The participated divine consciousness realizes itself as human consciousness in man and woman. Male and female He made them (Gen. 2:22). The psychosomatic difference, a difference of body structure as well as of mental attitudes and aptitudes, was and is conducive to the fusion of consciousness. The complementarity is therefore not merely of consciousness but of all that pertains to human consciousness. Thus man finds woman's body, sound, feelings, tastes and talents complementary to his and vice versa. But this awareness and instinctive acceptance is based on mutual openness and is realized in its fullest splendor only with the fusion of consciousness, which alone raises mutual complementarity to the level of authentic love.

In this way fusion of consciousness in human beings becomes sex-dimensioned and is also known as sexual complementarity. Sexual complementarity has its finest and most authentic expression in marriage when man and woman accept each other as husband and wife in holy and permanent wedlock. They become one not only in flesh, but more so in consciousness. And it is precisely when this openness in consciousness is lacking that marriage is bound to fail. That love which discovers and fosters the fusion of consciousness is the life and splendor of marriage. Each member should allow himself or herself to be transformed by the other; thus the two become one not only in flesh but also in consciousness. Sex and sexual complementarity are to be understood against the background of love, commitment and the becoming one in flesh as well as in consciousness. Sexual complementarity is thus the beauty of human nature, a precious gift with which God has blessed humanity in the primal design.

However, as we have already seen, sexual complementarity realized in marriage is not a necessity for everyone. What is primary and the most decisive factor even in sexual complementarity is the fusion of consciousness between two persons, making them one in the most profound and lasting sense. Led by divine experience, one may find his complementarity and happiness not in marriage but directly in God. Here too the fusion of consciousness, which is a fundamental need of man, takes place; but here it takes a different turn. Instead of selecting a finite consciousness with all its psychosomatic charm the chaste religious, led by the divine Spirit, chooses the divine consciousness and allows himself to be absorbed by it. Thus man's fundamental openness toward the other in virtue of the nature of his consciousness finds its radical solution for the religious in his union with the divine. The inherent and natural quest for fusion is for him thus sublimely fulfilled. The joy and tranquillity of such a union which takes place in consciousness may very well overflow into his psychosomatic structures, leaving his mind, body and entire being in a state of rapture, peace and profoundness. Such a religious lives no longer "single." He is always in union with the divine consciousness, and it is for this reason we call him a mystic.

Celibacy and Mysticism

If the state of man when alone is unnatural and frightening, and if the celibate does not choose to unite with a finite consciousness (with a human being of the opposite sex) as the exclusive object of his love, then the celibate has little option—he must become a mystic. By a mystic we mean the man whose consciousness is in touch with the divine in a profound way. However, the word “mysticism” is understood in a variety of meanings and the sense in which it is used here needs some explanation.

Mysticism is the elevation of human consciousness to a state which at least to some extent is beyond description. Essentially it involves transcendence over empirical everyday existence. As F. C. Happold puts it: “In it are found four interrelated visions; the vision of oneness, the vision of timelessness, the vision of a Self other than the empirical self, and the vision of a love enfolding everything that exists.”⁴

Each one experiences the mystic state in his own way. Yet a quest for the ultimate unity in one, which involves transcendence over what we know in the world as time, can be said to be a characteristic of all forms of mysticism. We exist in a world of manifoldness. Our habitual conceptualization makes us perceive the world as being filled with objects separated from ourselves. So we experience persons as distinct and separate beings. However, if we are to discover the deepest meaning in life we have to unite all things in a single experience. Philosophically we may do this by asserting that all that exists has its origin in God. In this way we come to a synthesis of all in One. But this is only a philosophical synthesis, an intellectual conclusion. Existentially to experience this ultimate synthesis of all in one is a very different matter from philosophizing about it. The mystic moves in the process of this actuality of experience. Such an experience may take different forms. For example, nature mystics usually see the unity of all in a kind of cosmic awareness; everything in the universe seems to be interlocked and related. This may be experienced as an all-pervading life, or as

⁴F. C. Happold, *Mysticism* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 119.

light or an overwhelming beauty. The word "God" is not usually specifically mentioned, though a divine cosmic impersonal omnipresence is acknowledged. Thus it is the cosmic process itself which is dynamically experienced, with the mystic knowing himself to be that process.

In another form of mysticism, sometimes known as self- or soul-mysticism, the unity and final synthesis of all is found in the Self, which is ultimately identified with one's own self. The quest for unity has its most uncompromising expression in this form of mysticism. Traces of this type of mysticism may be seen in the Upanishads. Sankara and his school of *advaita* is the most powerful representation of this type.

A third type of mysticism perceives the unity of all in God, an Absolute Thou from whom everything including one's own self proceeds and into whom everything returns. This Absolute Thou, in whom the whole universe is centered becomes the inspiring principle of the mystic. He lives and moves in God and for God. The goal is intense union with God which will never be understood as absolute identity. But the individual self of man may find itself absorbed in the Divine Self. However, being essentially a dualistic mysticism the mystic always addresses God as "Thou." This is the traditional form of Christian mysticism and to follow this pattern will be easier for the Christian religious.

Though we have reservations concerning the first two forms of mysticism mentioned above, some aspects of these forms are experienced also in Christian mysticism. The integration and the interrelatedness of all in the universe as seen by a nature mystic is transmuted by a Christian mystic in his vision of a Christic world. The state of cosmic consciousness to which a nature mystic may arise now becomes the consciousness of a cosmic Christ,⁵ or of a Christic cosmos. With St. Paul the Christian mystic cries out: "Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11).

As union with God leads one to ecstasy, the true vision of one's own self is said to take one to a blissful state of mind known as "enstasy." Enstasy, as it means "standing inside oneself" in contrast

⁵Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Hymn of the Universe* (London: Collins, 1965).

to ecstasy (standing outside oneself), denotes the overcoming of all dualities. The Christian vision of the Word, who becoming flesh laid the foundation of our human nature and of the whole universe, comes very close to this vision, though in Christianity the immanence of God is always balanced by His transcendence. The Christian mystic sees the Word inwardly as the ultimate foundation of his being and outwardly as the Absolute who in the fullness of time has become flesh for his sake.

The union with the Word that is worked out in him through mystic experience develops both these aspects. On the one hand the mystic religious gets grounded deeper and deeper in the ultimate foundation of all, the Word. On the other hand the deeper he knows the Word, the more profound becomes his vision of Christ, who is the Word made flesh, and the vision of his universe. He relates himself to Christ in a most intimate way. Christ being the Word made flesh, and the Word being the foundation of his own flesh, in understanding Christ he understands himself in greater profoundness. Since his flesh, as well as that of Christ, is placed in the world, in understanding the Word as flesh he understands also the world as related to the flesh and through the flesh to the Word. Therefore in the final mystic vision the gifted religious sees everything in one. The One is Christ the Word who became man and thus provided the foundation for humanity, and dwelt among us in this world, and thus integrated this world unto Himself. The unity that is experienced here is beyond description. The fusion of consciousness which is a basic drive in human nature is realized here in a high degree. The mystic experience is, therefore, supremely satisfying, enabling and enriching.

Since all men are called to transcend time and live in the Spirit, it is obvious that married people can have mystic experiences. But the celibate religious is in a privileged position to devote himself to divine union with an "undivided heart." The celibate is happy when he is a mystic, and is really happy only if he is a mystic.

The Celibate Mystic

Having chosen the Word, the person par excellence, the celibate is in an exalted position to realize his openness to the other in a

special way. This realization is achieved primarily on the consciousness level, which makes sex in man "human." Of course the celibate gives up all kinds of sexual fulfilment which are essentially body-bound. But this does not leave him totally unfulfilled. He seeks his fulfilment and realization in a different realm, in the realm of divine consciousness, which he sees personified in the Word. The body dimension of the sexual openness to the other is given up, precisely because the quest in him is to transcend time and matter and reach the Spirit and its mode of life which is characterized by timelessness. Thus he decides to be celibate for the kingdom of God.

Having Christ, the Word made flesh, before him as his ideal, the Celibate becomes Christlike in his very decision to be a celibate. This is the incarnational mystery reflected in the profession of a celibate life. The Word, who became flesh, gave himself totally to the flesh. The flesh, which was the human nature of Christ, belonged totally to the Word. This belongingness was so complete and unconditional that there was nothing in between the flesh and the Word, not even a human person directly actuating the human nature, as in every other human being. In Jesus Christ the flesh was totally of the Word, and was directly dependent on the Word Himself. The theology of the incarnation teaches us that in Jesus Christ there is only one person, the person of the Word. The union between the flesh and the Word was, therefore, the most intimate and extraordinarily singular. Theologically we call it hypostatic union, the union of two natures (divine and human) in one person. Every human being, other than Christ, is a human person. As a person he gives himself totally to the Word. He could have given himself exclusively to another human person and then both together to the Word. This happens in marriage. But in so doing he takes up the heavy responsibility of sharing his human nature exclusively with another one, and all the consequences thereof. The religious refuses to do so because he wants to surrender his whole flesh to the Word with no particular claim to any one else. As in Christ's relationship to humanity there is no human person in between the Word and humanity, so also in the celibate's relationship to the Word there is none in between himself and the Word. The relationship to the Word, however, makes him intimately related

to all, because all, men as well as nature, are related to the Word. The celibate therefore, delicately loves all, serves all, though he transcends all relationships and holds himself ever open to the Word. This transcendence sets him radically free.

It is this kind of transcendence and total freedom to serve the Lord that St. Paul suggests in his epistle to the Corinthians.

I would have you free from anxieties. He who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord how to please the Lord, but he who is married is concerned about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit, but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:32-36).

Freedom is transcendence, the capacity to rise above. Man is free because he is created with a radical openness to God (Being as such) and nothing other than God can really fill this openness. Hence a basic God-orientation must be in all lives. Even in holy wedlock, when partners do not agree, one may have to transcend his/her partner and decide personally when it is a question of deciding for or against God. Man's relationship with creatures, whether men or things, can never be without a certain degree of transcendence. If this minimum openness to transcendence is closed man becomes a slave of that particular creature, lives in bondage. Transcendence as essential freedom is the basic characteristic note of humanity and thus the right of all.

But in the above passage, St. Paul is presenting an idea of total transcendence that one may be totally free to develop and fulfil one's own fundamental orientation to God, which is the most basic and constitutive element in man's openness toward the other. The fulfilment is sought in its most radical sense, namely in a mystic union with the Word, the origin and goal of human consciousness itself.

This orientation to and the union with the Word in the celibate religious is a lived experience. Consecrated celibacy really lives on

and is strengthened by this lived experience. With St. Paul the celibate mystic says: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Christ becomes real to him, as real as his own life. The fusion with the Word is not just an idea, but real, existential complementarity. With intense desire he longs "to depart and to be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). Though united with the Word he is still in the flesh and his flesh is in the world. All limitations of time and space work on him. By the power of transcendence he would like to break all barriers and fly aloft straight to Christ and float in the love of Christ eternally, uninterruptedly. The mystic longs for this full union and realization, for the complete transformation of his self-awareness to that of Christ. While on earth he has only moments of this blissful union and gets only glimpses of the total converging vision (2 Cor. 12:3-5). But the power of these privileged moments of experience is thoroughly penetrating and all pervading. He is strengthened by them and his hope for the final consuming union is unwavering. "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Strengthened by the intensity of this union, by the power of the newly awakened consciousness—Christ consciousness—he exclaims with St. Paul:

For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel nor prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

Yes, the mystic lives in unshakable courage. Courage does away with anxiety. Even in the midst of trials and tribulations his heart is full of interior joy, because he is with his beloved. His consciousness is characterized by that of his beloved who, he knows, is all powerful. Characterized by Christ/Word-consciousness, he participates in the very strength of Christ. He is never "alone." Nay, open as he is toward the other, he can never afford to live all alone. Aloofness and loneliness breed anxiety in man. All anxieties can ultimately be reduced to the one anxiety, namely, the anxiety about realizing one's own possibilities. The mystic, though he may be struggling to realize many of his dreams in this world, is basically certain about

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his ultimate, all-fulfilling realization: to be with the Word. He experiences the joy of his realization already now; he is strengthened by it and is hopeful of its final consummation. In his heart of hearts he is beyond all anxiety and fear, because he has chosen "that which will never be taken away from him" (Lk. 10:42).

Chastity and the Universality of Love

We have already seen that the religious related to the Word is related to all because everything in the world is from and for the Word. The world of love of the consecrated religious is, therefore, not narrow. It is as vast as the whole universe. It contains all men and women, all who share the image of Christ, the visible expression of the invisible Word and all beings in the world of Christ.

First of all by his orientation to the Word he becomes universal just as the Word became universal in his relationship to humanity. The Word who became flesh was for all. He was the inner foundation of every man and the final goal of every man's love. He gave himself up for all. No one had any exclusive claim on Him. His orientation was primarily to humanity which virtually included all human individuals. What was most dear to Him, namely the human nature which was His own self-expression, He shared with all. His unbounded love really knew no limitation. The religious who is consecrated to Jesus participates in this unbounded love of Jesus.

Consecrated as he is to the Word the religious immediately becomes the property of the Word. The religious comes to this by surrendering his flesh to the Word from whom he has received it. Designed as the expression of the Word he knows that the Word is the real interiority of the flesh he has. But now it is his own. He could offer it to someone else and begin a life of happy union and love in marriage. The religious refuses to do so, chooses the Word itself, asks the Word to be his very interiority and the sole principle of life. The Word accepts the offer, becomes the life principle of the flesh offered to Him, transforms it to the nature of His flesh which He Himself has become. Now, the flesh of the religious is the consecrated flesh and is one with that of Jesus. As Jesus is for all, the flesh of the consecrated religious also becomes the property of all. Anything truly consecrated becomes the property of all because what is

consecrated is of God and what is of God is of all. This is excellently exemplified in the Eucharistic sacrifice. The bread that is brought to the altar, once it is consecrated in the Mass, becomes the property of all. Any one who approaches the altar receives a share from it. The consecrated bread is therefore broken and given to all. Similarly the consecrated religious too is broken and given to many. This he does by giving himself to others in unselfish love, dedication, suffering and service. Hence by a very strong inner orientation the religious, consecrated as he is, is called to a universal love and is therefore open to all. To block this universal openness in any way would be to go against the consecrated nature of his being. Hence the religious has to remain open to all and his love should virtually contain all. In actuality, however, the religious will be loving and spending himself in a very special way for those whom he encounters and who are entrusted by Providence to his loving care. The religious loves them, spends himself for them, suffers and prays for them. But at the same time he sees them as the chosen representatives from the great world of love to which his consciousness has been awakened and finds himself open.

Thus the consecrated religious does not and cannot exclude anyone from the world of his love. But because of human limitation his actual world of love will be much smaller. Into this small but concrete world which virtually contains the whole world he especially brings in those who do not get love and affection elsewhere. Thus the lovelorn, the forsaken, the poor and the destitute are his friends in a special way because they need his help and affection more. He is aware also that in the midst of affluence as well as in the depth of poverty one may find oneself deprived of love. Although naturally open to all, the consecrated religious has a predilection for those who have not yet tasted true and unselfish love. The religious would like to give his love to them in a special way, that by tasting true and authentic human love, they may come to the divine.

Called to a life of celibacy the religious is called to the personal integration of his flesh in the Word. Called to integration he is called to lead a consecrated life. Called to consecration he is called to universal love. Called to universal love he spends himself for all. Spending himself for all he becomes a living oblation before the Lord, an oblation which is broken and given to all.

...4

POVERTY AS COSMIC INTEGRATION

The Surrender of the Larger Self

The religious life as a call to integration is a lifelong process. The process begins with the integration of one's flesh in the Word. We call this personal integration, or the integration of one's flesh in the Word, and understand it as the substance of celibacy. Accordingly celibacy was interpreted as the surrendering of one's flesh, being, and self to the Word. Such a surrender remains incomplete unless it takes along with it all that belongs to the flesh, to one's own being or self. Man's flesh is placed in this world and is intimately related to it. His being is supported by his having. Associating himself with the world and with what he has in the world, he gives shape to what may be called his larger self. This larger self is at the same time the cosmos he has constructed and in which he dwells. The religious who surrenders his flesh to the Word surrenders also this self-constructed world to the Word, so that the Word alone becomes the inspiring principle of his world just as it is of his flesh. His world becomes fully integrated in the Word, a world filled with and led by the consciousness of Christ. This surrendering of his larger self, his world of concerns and possibilities, of all his havings along with his being, to the Word for the sake of complete and unconditional integration of all in the Word, is the essence of religious poverty.

Man's being is said by some to be "worldly." He is placed in a world and is intimately related to the things of the world. The flesh

he is, is understandable only against the background of a world according to this philosophy. Even in classical scholastic philosophy the senses of man were considered as doorways through which he goes out to the world and through which he brings the world in. Thus, in classical philosophy, man and the world were intimately related.

Contemporary philosophy has thrown much more light on this point. Heidegger, for example, describes man as Being-in-the-world.¹ The world here means not the totality of being, but something of human creativity. Man sees new ways of relating himself with other beings in the world and allows new worlds of possibilities to be created for him. In this view man has his world of ambition, achievements, success, discoveries and so on. These new worlds which he creatively projects are to be considered as the continuation of his own being, the worlds of his own self-realization. Without the background of such worlds man and his creativity are not understandable. Everyone alive today lives in such a world. To the world belong his value systems, relationships, his affections and his possessions. Man is the center of his own world as he was the center responsible for its outflowing creation.

The world formed around the central being of an individual and projected by him can be understood as being his own larger self. Everything in the world becomes part of this newly projected world and is seen as subordinated to his own awareness of self. It is this world, this larger self, which contains everything existential within itself that the religious surrenders to the Word. With this surrendering the world becomes for him the world of Christ, and the Christ, the person of the Word, becomes the center and the principal agent of the world and of his possibilities. Self-realization in and through the world now gives way to realization of the central self as Christ in and through the world.

This surrendering of the world to the Word is the natural continuation of one's surrender of his flesh to the Word. The integration is complete only when it extends to include all the possibilities open to the being of the religious. Hence the integration of the flesh, to

¹Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (London: SCM, 1962), pp. 104-110.

be true and total, has to be cosmic because flesh is cosmic in its deepest nature. Through the process of cosmic integration the religious wills that everything shall be the Word and exist for the Word only, not for himself and for his petty individual interests. In the language of devotion this cosmic integration is the offering at the feet of the Lord of everything possessed by the individual, including his own being and existence.

As the ultimate and unconditional offering of everything at the feet of the Lord, the cosmic integration aims at establishing once again the original design for the universe. The Word, just as it is the foundation of the flesh, is also the ultimate foundation and the central sustaining power of the world. Humanity, which the Word became first as the flesh of Christ and then as mankind, was placed in the universe. The universe was, therefore, conceived together with the humanity of Christ.² The religious, by integrating within himself the whole universe in the Word, revives this original design and re-actualizes it in his life. In other words, poverty is that by which the religious realizes the fact of the essentially cosmic being of Christ. Cosmic integration, however, demands the complete surrendering of all to the Word. The religious who truly professes poverty is poor because he keeps nothing for himself. He is enormously rich because everything in this world is his as the means of his Christ-realization. Since he keeps nothing for himself but gives all to the Word, poverty necessarily involves *kenosis*, a self-emptying process.

Poverty as Kenosis

When Mother Teresa was asked what would happen to her congregation after she had gone, she is said to have responded: "A person emptier than myself will come." The implication here is that the greatness of a person lies in the depth of his own self-emptying. Another implication is that what is emptied of oneself will be filled with the self of God. Poverty as a chosen life-style is

²Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. II (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1962), pp. 210ff. Cf. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Hymn of the Universe* (London: Collins, 1965), p. 77.

precisely this: to empty oneself of all that one is and has so that all will be at the disposal of the Lord.

The idea of kenosis has its origin in the act of the Incarnation of Christ. The Word emptied itself and took the form of a servant. The religious who professes poverty empties himself of his own flesh and of the world arising from the projection of his flesh and offers all to the Word that all may become Word-filled, the abode and expression of divine consciousness on earth. All that is flesh is offered; indeed all that is created, as all of it is seen to arise from the Word, is now groaning to be united with the Word. The religious with his stress on poverty as integration and kenosis accelerates by the expression of his life the process of the return of the universe to its origin, to its sublime realization in Christ.

Kenosis, which is essentially an emptying of the self, involves renunciation. The renunciation of the riches of one's being and having has nothing positive in itself, but it can become positive in its orientation to something else. Christ renounced his divine position and became man to make man divine. The religious also renounces everything for the creation of a new world, of a new heaven and a new earth centered on Christ. He envisages a world of Christ which is more just, more friendly, more human and thus more divine as well.³ Poverty with its utter unselfishness and prophetic courage proclaims the advent of such a world, wherein all things are of all men, and all men are of Christ.

Poverty as Sharing

Poverty as kenosis and cosmic integration makes the world become totally consecrated to the Word. Kenosis which is emptying, as it eradicates human possessiveness and brings the awareness of divine consciousness in all, makes the Word itself incarnate — the Lord of the universe. For those who are poor in the Lord the world is Christic and the Christ is cosmic, then what is of Christ is of all. The Word who became flesh assumed human nature in such a way as to carefully avoid the possibility of a human person being able

³Gustavo Guitierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973).

exclusively to claim the Word for himself, so that the assumed flesh became the rightful claim of all. It is for this reason we conclude our prayers: "This we ask through Christ our Lord." Yes, He is *our own Lord* in the strict sense of the Word. Jesus shared his flesh, his own human nature, with every one of us. We can all rightfully claim to be of the same nature as Christ.

What is true of the flesh of Christ is also true of the world of Christ. The world of Christ is the world of all men. As the cosmic Christ is the natural and rightful claim of all, so the world which is Christic is everybody's rightful claim. The religious who surrenders his world to Christ makes this world Christic, and thus a sacramental object and structure of universal sharing. His world is divided and distributed to all in the manner Christ Himself wants this to be done. Though the desire of the poor in the Lord is to share all with all, because of human limitations the actual sharing is often narrowed down to those who are immediately close to him spatially or mentally. And, in his given circumstances he seeks to share first with those who are in dire need and who are helpless. Therefore, the poor in the Lord shares his being with the needy around him and shares with them also their suffering and inconveniences. This the religious does to emulate the Son of man who did the same when He was in this world: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20).

The sharing of one's having does not mean that the one who shares should necessarily be rich in material wealth. What is shared is his whole being and having, and all the possibilities thereof. In the poor and underdeveloped countries this may often be associated with material giving as well. But here too what is of most value in the gift and evangelically inspiring is the affection and love, the esteem and regard, which is also being freely shared. In affluent countries people in general do not expect or look for material help. But many of them live in dire poverty of heart as they do not receive love and affection from their broken families, nor from the extremely business-minded and profit-oriented world in which they live. What they need is someone to speak to, someone who has time to listen to them and who can give them the experience of love and trust. The religious who has taken the vow of pov-

erty shares his time with them; he helps to make their world more trustworthy and more nearly filled with love and affection. Thus he helps to make the world more Christian and divine.

Kenosis, when expressed as emptying and renunciation, demands heroic courage and absolute confidence in the providence of God. Poverty is therefore to be seen as the expression of courage and confidence. As courage it helps a man to rise above all things, and as confidence it makes God alone the focus of his attention to all. Poverty which truly is kenosis and renunciation, courage and confidence, brings freedom to the religious who practices it.

Poverty as Transcendental Freedom

It makes no essential difference whether a man is bound by a golden thread or by an iron chain. In both cases he is in bondage and so is not free. No form of enslavement, whether it be gross or subtle, ugly or beautiful, can ever lead to freedom. The golden threads of, for example, wealth, religion or knowledge; or the iron chains of poverty, ignorance and fear — all these and more have to be transcended if one wants to enjoy authentic freedom. Freedom is essentially transcendence. Poverty settles the religious in this spirit of genuine freedom which is transcendence.

Freedom has always been considered as one of the greatest of human values. It is an accepted belief in Christianity that Christ came to free us from the bondage of sin. The Indian religious also understand salvation as *moksha* (liberation) which ultimately means freedom from the bondage of *karma* (the result of one's own action).⁴ In either case man is authentic and true only when he is free. And man is not free when he is under the influence of the disorientation resulting from his basic disintegration, which is sin. Instead of discovering his own divine center and bringing his being and having to that center, the disoriented man focuses his attention on the things of this world, allows himself to be bound by them and plunges into a state of complete inauthenticity. This is very

⁴Cf. V. F. Vineeth (Vadakethala), "A Yoga for Liberation," *Journal of Dharma*, vol. II, no. 1, pp. 38ff.

well exemplified in the parable of the prodigal son. The prodigal son, unaware of his own dignity, abandoned the loving presence of his father and sought the pleasures of the world. He became a slave to his own passions and to the base desires which tied him to the world. Only a crisis made him aware of his state of bondage. The awakening of this authentic consciousness arising within him from his own center made him once again free. From that moment onward he experienced a new relationship with this world and with the things of this world. The religious who professes poverty surrenders his world to such an awakening of a new consciousness. This is the consciousness of the Word, and from that time onward the religious holds himself free from all the enslaving beliefs, passions, attitudes and conditionings which previously existed and which enmeshed him in the world.

True freedom and ultimate authenticity is one and the same state of being. The highest form of freedom arises from the discovery and unshakable establishment of one's most authentic and total self. This total self includes, as we have already seen, the flesh as well as the world in which the flesh is placed. Discovery of the total self is, therefore, the discovery of the self as and in the world. However, to be authentic the self should be experienced in its own centeredness which ultimately is the Word from whose outflowing process—the process of becoming flesh—everything has arisen. Cosmic integration in the Word is the bringing of the world back to its ultimate center. It is by the power and true expression of vowed poverty that the religious establishes his world in the Word, and discovering his larger self in its ultimate authenticity, becomes free.

Designed as he was in and for the Word man will find his happiness only in and with the Word. This basic orientation of man to the Word which is the fullness of his being in truth, raises him above everything that is not the fullness as such but the mere expression of it. If man allows himself to be bound by the momentary charm of the expression rather than by the eternal verity of that from which the expression comes, by the visible attraction of creatures instead of the attraction of the invisible Creator Himself, then man acts foolishly. He is then in the state of basic ignorance

called *avidya*.⁵ In the Indian way of thinking this ignorance produces actions done in passion, which actions in their turn intensify the ignorance still further. Because of the action of ignorance and *karma* man cannot be called free. Professed poverty lays the foundation for eradicating this ignorance from man and invites him to a kind of *nishkamakarma*⁶ (passionless activity).

Man's basic orientation to the fullness of being, that is to God, gives him the inner power to employ any being or form of worldly structure for this purpose without himself becoming subject to what he employs. Professed poverty is the actualization of this great inherent power in man. The religious who professes poverty employs all that may be at his disposal, but always rises above it by virtue of his orientation to the Word who is the fullness of being and truth. Anything which is not the Word, which is not God Himself, has no compelling force on the religious, though he sees all as means to be used in the process of his realization in Christ, in the Word made flesh. He is free because he knows how to transcend. He transcends because given to the Word by self-emptying he is now totally of the Word; nothing other than the Word can tempt or compel him. Poverty is transcendence, transcendence is freedom, poverty is transcendental freedom.

⁵*Avidya* associated with *karma* is the basic human predicament according to Hinduism. *Avidya* could be compared to the Christian concept of "unfaith" according to Paul Tillich. Cf. Vineeth (Vadakethala), "Yoga and the Reversal of the Fall," *Jeevadhara*, vol. VI (Nov.-Dec. 1976), pp. 537ff.

⁶One of the most important doctrines taught in the *Geetha* is the doctrine of *nishkamakarma*. *Nishkamakarma* is not renunciation of action but renunciation in action. Cf. B. G. Tilak, *Gita Rahasya* (Poona 1971), pp. 416ff.

...5

OBEDIENCE AS CONCERN FOR CHRIST-REALIZATION

The religious has surrendered his flesh and his world, his being and his having to the Word. He has done so because he wishes that the Word and the Word alone be the interiority of his flesh and of his world. Therefore, now he is led by one single concern: the concern of listening to the whisperings of the Word and realizing them in every detail of his life. This concern for hearing the Word of God and realizing it in his life and in his world is the essence of his obedience. Obedience is, therefore, essentially a kind of listening to the Word of God. The Word of God is listened to that it may become the decisive power, the sole life-stream, in one's life. The listening is, therefore, for the sake of realizing in one's own life what is being heard. Man, theologically seen, is the hearer of the Word of God,¹ and his primal concern is realizing the Word of God in his own life. The Word of God realized in human flesh in all its beauty and splendor is Jesus Christ. The religious who is determined to realize the Word of God in himself is, therefore, really given to the awakening of Christ-consciousness within himself, and is sincerely concerned about it. Obedience thus becomes concern for Christ-realization in one's own life.

Contemporary philosophy has tried to define man as concern.²

¹Cf. Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the Word* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969).

²Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1963), p. 183. Cf. also Vineeth (Vadakethala), *The Discovery of Being* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1970), pp. 44-46.

Man is said to be a concern about realizing his own possibilities. Every man is concerned about his future. One's future depends more on possibility than on actuality. It is in the light of future possibilities that many a man lives hopefully. When these possibilities are threatened man falls a prey to anxiety. Anxiety in the last analysis is nothing but the threat against the possibilities of one's own self-realization.³ Every man lives in the hope of this self-realization and as such is concerned about it.

The religious who has surrendered his consciousness to the Word is also concerned about realizing the Word in his own life. The total transformation of his consciousness to that of Christ is the highest possibility he sees, and his life is a movement toward the consummation of this. His life is a real concern for Christ-realization. This realization (*saksatkara*) is not to be confused with absolute identity of the one in the other. However, it is to be remembered that the intense realization of the Word within oneself may lead one to the awareness of a sort of identity of consciousness, not of existence, as we see in St. Paul who says, "Now it is not I who live but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Religious obedience as commitment to the Word is a real concern to follow the Word in every detail of one's life as to result in identity of consciousness. Being a reflection of the divine consciousness which is the Word, man's consciousness can regain its authenticity only if it returns to the Word. Religious obedience is a constant concern for regaining the authenticity of human consciousness. For this purpose the consecrated religious listens to the Word carefully. This very listening, by which the religious continuously goes out of himself and responds to the call of the Word, is the fundamental happening or event in the life of the religious. His life is nothing but a response to the Word of God who calls him from within.

The Indian word for listening is *śrddha*, a word related to the Sanskrit *sruti* (revelation: what has been heard), and Latin *credo* (faith). The listening to the Word of God which is *śrddha* is to be understood together with *sruti* and *credo* as revelation and faith.

³Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 186-187; cf. also *Was ist Metaphysik?* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1960), pp. 32ff.

The religious hears the Word in faith. He discovers the Word in faith and develops a skill or sensibility to discover it continuously in and through everything that happens in and around him. Religious obedience is a process of discovering the Word of God and realizing it.

Obedience and the Discovery of the Word of God

The religious is dedicated to the Word of God and is led by the single concern of realizing the Word in his life. But how is the Word to be discovered? The Word is never given totally or completely to him or to any one. But the Word is everywhere and is given continuously to him through the events that take place in and around him. The Word reveals itself concealingly. God always reveals Himself concealingly. Therefore God's revelation always becomes sacramental: the visible manifestation of the invisible reality. Jesus Himself was the basic sacrament⁴ in whom the Word, the invisible face of the Father, revealed Himself in visibility. But the visible human nature was at the same time that in which the Word remained concealed. It was because of this concealing nature of divine revelation that many Jews who saw Jesus did not see the Word in Him, but only the son of a carpenter. At the same time Jesus rebuked their unfaith, because the visible medium was meant for the revelation of the invisible and was constantly manifesting the invisible Word through its actions.

The religious discovers the invisible Word through its visible manifestations. Every human means which the Word uses for its own self-manifestation is taken seriously by the religious who is dedicated to the Word. Since the Word reveals itself concealingly this discovery takes place always in faith. The religious listens to the Word in faith. Meditating on the Word of God in faith the religious develops an exquisite sensibility to the whisperings of the Word. These whisperings, subtle though they are, are listened to by his *śraddha* (attention) which at the same time is his *credo*

⁴Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

(faith). In the promptings of the Spirit as well as in the teachings of the Church, in the inspirations of his congregation as well as in the aspirations of the people around him, he sees the Word revealing Himself concealingly to humanity. He sees all events as the signs of the time through which the Word communicates Himself to him. Obedience is the art of hearing the Word in silence and discovering the invisible Word through visible signs.

Committed to the Word in and through a loving community, the religious is especially concerned about the communitarian discovery of the Word. Therefore he seeks the Word in a very special way in the consciousness of his own community. For this purpose he delves deep into the spirit of the constitution of his community which officially reflects its common consciousness. To this is to be added the acceptable customs of the community, the decisions of general chapters and so on. The superior and every religious with whom he lives also play their role in helping him to discover the Word in his life. The religious, dedicated as he is to listening to the Word, makes use of all these human means with great reverence and devotion. He is well aware that his commitment is ultimately to the Word, to Christ Himself, and nothing less than God, however holy it may look, can ever be a possible substitute for Christ. Hence if Christ or the Word demands that he quit the particular life-style he has chosen and follow another pattern of life which is more expressive of his commitment to the Word, he has to do so, because his commitment is to the Word and not primarily to the life-style of his congregation. One should be careful not to be deceived or led by wishful thinking devoid of realism and discernment of spirit. But once the way of the Lord is made known to him for certain, however painful it be, he has to follow that path. This is what St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila did. They had the courage and confidence to transcend their own life-style and give shape to a new one as the Word asked them to do. The same is true with Mother Teresa of Calcutta who had to leave her original congregation so that she might do what the Word whispered in her mind. All these great and holy souls had power and courage to transcend their own congregations in virtue of their openness to the Word. Obviously though such great enterprises are not demanded

of every one of us, and normally a religious is expected to live in the congregation in which providence has originally placed him, still it is to be remembered that each and every religious, committed to the Word, transcends in spirit all that is human and man-made, while at the same time only realizing himself in a world of human creativity and action.

*Dialogue and the Communitarian Discovery
of the Word of God*

The religious discovers the Word in the community. Every member of the community is in one way or other contributing to the discovery of the Word. Since every individual is led by the spirit to lead a life of evangelical counsel, every member of the society has the spirit in him and as such is the bearer of the Word. In a common search for the understanding of the self-revealing Word, a good religious seeks light from his fellow religious who bear the Word in themselves. Presenting his discovery of the Word and participating in the discovery of the Word by his fellow religious, the religious grows both in mutual self-discovery and in the discovery of the Word. Thus dialogue leads one to the evolution of one's thinking, to a better understanding of one's fellows and above all to the discovery of the Word in community.

The basic condition for a successful dialogue is openness. We have already seen that man is fundamentally openness. Because he is open, he goes to the other, he listens to the other. When one goes to the other with a willingness to listen, dialogue emerges. Real dialogue is always mutual self-giving and self-fulfilling. More recently the Church has given greater emphasis to the spirit of dialogue in religious communities. This marks a growth in the consciousness of the Church, a greater readiness to acknowledge the individual consciousness of man. The spirit of dialogue also points to the limitations of every individual and the need of being helped by the other. The word "dialogue" somehow symbolizes the spirit of humility, shared search and earnestness in discovering truth.

Since the real dialogue must always be characterized by a genuine spirit of humility, awareness of one's own limitations, shared

search and earnestness after truth, one should never come for dialogue with finalized resolutions and clear-cut decisions. For the communitarian discovery of the Word of God all should come with an open mind, ready to follow the self-revealing Word as it reveals itself more and more through the words of one's fellows. When a problem is presented for their consideration, the members have to come together for the assembly (local synaxis) after studying all the possible evidences regarding the proposed problem and yet with an open mind, because they are coming to listen to and to shape the opinion of the community in whose heart is sought the self-revealing Word.

For the smooth and efficient running of the communitarian discovery of the Word of God we may suggest the following procedure. After mature study and prayerful reflection the members of the assembly gather in the hall with an open mind. Then the superior presents the problem at issue with perfect impartiality. A discussion session may follow, if something similar has not yet taken place before. However it will be wiser not to make the discussion session a decision-making session. In the discussion session we really evolve the idea, hearing the pros and cons of the question at issue. Very often in a discussion session we may be more preoccupied with answering the objections than assimilating the views of our fellow religious who oppose ours. To avoid this problem it is better to have a small break after the discussion session for prayerful recollection. When the community gathers again we may once again hear the pros and cons of the problem. But now not in the form of a discussion session, but in two separate sessions with a break in between. First we hear all the pros: only those who are in favor of the proposed project speak. Every other member of the community, even those who have strong views against, instead of trying to answer and counter argue, tries to understand and assimilate his fellow religious's views. After a break for silent and prayerful reflection the community gathers again to consider the cons: all the points that are against the proposition are brought out. Now those who are for the proposition keep quiet, listen and assimilate. After another small break for prayerful reflection the community gathers again for consensus testing. The superior or one appointed

by him may summarize the pros and cons with an impartial attitude before the voting. Then everybody votes as he is finally inspired by the Spirit. If the community comes to a unanimous or nearly unanimous decision let them thank God for that gift and move to its execution. If on the contrary the decision is passed only by a very narrow majority (for example pros: 8; cons: 5) it would be better to allow some time for the members to reconsider and change their mind in order to become "more united in mind and heart" in making a decision. The community may decide that the result of the voting be displayed in public and any one who changes his mind may indicate his new decision so as to make known to the community the present state of consensus. It is a beautiful experience to witness that in the course of a few days members learn to read opponents' minds and allow themselves to be changed; and the consensus of the community moves toward a greater degree of unanimity. Thus the community seeks the revelations of the Word through the deliberations of its own members and painfully works for the building up of that original Christian brotherhood in which, "united in heart and soul no one claimed for his own use anything that he had" (Acts 4:32). However, to be realistic, one has to expect that occasions may arise when the community does not come to unanimity. In such circumstances the superior may have to execute a decision which is opposed by a considerable number of the members of the community. The members of the community have to show their solidarity in such cases, and all, including those who have originally opposed the idea, have to cooperate for the success of the project thus proposed and decided on. Once the decision is passed by the community, even though not unanimously, officially the decision carries the authority of the community.

Authority and the Inner Claim of Reality

Obedience as listening implies the idea that the Word is to be listened to. Why should the Word be listened to? The Word, being the consciousness of God, is the original source of all truth and, therefore, the ultimate term of reference for rectifying one's own conscience and way of life. The Word as the consciousness of the

Father has an inner claim to be so. The Word carries authority from within, from its own nature.

Authority is, therefore, an inner claim of reality which can be either in a person or in a thing but is always referred to the Word, the ultimate source of all authority. This claim of reality is most fundamentally found in persons, though things and circumstances can also have relative claims on man. A holy man's words carry weight, not because he is a superior, but simply because he is holy. Holiness is a claim of reality to which many easily yield. The Jews found that Christ taught with authority. The claim came from within. His very being was his authority. However, in human beings authority can be seen at personal and official levels. "Personal authority comes from the recognition of someone's superiority in a given sphere."⁵ This is a claim that emerges from within. "Official authority is the authority which a person has, not by reason of his personal superiority, but by reason of a function conferred on him or at least respected by society."⁶ In official authority the claim is more external. But in a conventional society the authority thus conferred on an individual becomes part of their structure of life. Authority as internal claim commands respect and wins obedience without power or coercion. Those who follow such authority do so because of their personal liking for it. They freely decide to be followers. Official authority, on the other hand, is meant for the smooth functioning of a given society or community. It is beyond doubt that the religious superiors have official authority. But the internal claim of the incorporated ideal of the congregation in his own life will be the greatest authority of any superior. And perhaps in this lies the great difference between the authority of the founder and the superiors who followed him.

The vow of obedience is directed to the Word who has and is the ultimate claim of all authority. All authentic permissions originally come from this Word who is presented to us as the inner claim of reality. Permissions do not come from the whims and fancies of a

⁵Waldemar Molinski, "Authority," in Karl Rahner, ed., *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 1 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 129.

⁶Ibid.

superior. They emerge from the ultimate reality of things. The Word that is being revealed through the nature of things summons us to free action, setting us free and thus giving us "permission" to act. The subjects as well as the superior have to study carefully the nature of things and the claim of reality that emerges from it. All human beings are bound by this claim of reality which ultimately is the basis of morality itself. Therefore, a superior may not deny permission simply because he does not like what has been requested. Rather he has to look into the nature of the request and see the inner claim of the proposition. From the emerging claim, if any, the superior also is not free. He has to yield to it. Of course the superior may need time to study and see the nature of things in greater depth and clarity.

The doctrine of the internal claim of reality is not a new one. It is virtually contained in the idea of "presumed" permission which is an acceptable term even in the traditional theology of obedience. A presumed permission remains a valid permission not because of the consent of the superior but because of the nature of things forcing the individual to act immediately. The superior's permission, which has been presumed is not yet a reality at the time of action and hence is incapable of giving validity to it. In fact the superior may perhaps even disagree with the decision. However, it does not vitiate the authenticity of the decision taken by the individual religious, provided he did it sincerely. The authenticity of his decision and the validity of the action emerges from the inner nature of the action itself which was then performed in answer to the claim of reality on him, that is to say, according to the nature of things through which the Word itself was then being communicated to him.

The doctrine of the inner claim of reality does not advocate chaotic freedom in a community. Rather it says that everybody is bound by objective norms emerging from the nature of things. It is this claim of being *that really sets us free*. However, it is the duty of the superior to articulate this claim for a community and promulgate it. Only then does it become an official permission. It would be too puerile to think that permissions always come exclusively from superiors. Permissions truly emerge from the inner

nature of things. But at the same time it would be equally too unbecoming of a religious to overlook the role of a superior in a community. Being a member of a community, the individual religious is also subject to the claims which the community has over him. That is why the religious carefully seeks the Word in the consciousness of the community. Very often it is the superior, or any equivalent authority structure, that articulates the consciousness of the community for the whole community. The individual who is never a slave to the community and hence is always free, is nevertheless bound by the community in many ways. This is especially so in religious life where the individual has freely opted for a community. Since authority has these two polarities of internal claim and official sanction, a tension similar to that between charism and office may make its appearance here too. But a good religious overcomes the tension by the power of the Spirit who reveals Himself in reality and speaks to him also through official authority.

...III

Prayer

*The religious is one who has been called to integrate himself in the Word. Given to the Word totally he is expected to be in a continual process of such an integration. But how does this ideal of integration become a reality in him? The simple answer to this question is one word: Prayer. Prayer is **the** means of integration.*

...6

PRAYER AND INTEGRATION

Given to the Word totally and unconditionally through the vows the religious looks forward to his cherished goal of Christ-realization. This longing for realization demands the transformation of his consciousness to that of Christ, the Word who has become flesh. It is through prayer that the religious is led to this inner transformation which is the sum and substance of interior integration.

Prayer and its Integrating Power

Strictly speaking prayer escapes all definitions, as all things that are most intimate in life are beyond definition. Prayer, for those who pray, is something very intimate and hence is an experience to be enjoyed rather than a concept to be defined. Prayer is often understood to be the lifting up on one's heart to God. Here the idea of a transcendent God is prominent. Similarly prayer is said to be a dialogue with God. But the God who is understood as transcendent is also equally immanent. If we follow this trend of thought, prayer can easily be understood as the discovery of God in one's own interior depth. Prayer is dialogue with that transcendent God and discovery of the immanent God. "When thou commandest to sing, it seems that my heart would break with pride," says Tagore in *Gitanjali*.¹ God is presented here as a Thou, an absolute Thou whom I address, to whom I pay my homage. But *Gitanjali* speaks of the immanent God as well. "He is the innermost one who awakens my

¹R. Tagore, *Gitanjali*, ii.

being with his deep hidden touches."² A still more profound (though perhaps controversial with regard to the *sense of interpreting* the passage) understanding of prayer as discovering the immanent God is given in *Chandogya Upanishad*:

*That which is subtle essence, this whole world
has it for its self. That is true.*

*That is the self. That art thou, Svetaketu.*³

Generally speaking the Indian tradition lays greater stress on prayer as entering into the interiority of one's own self, whereas the Judeo-Christian and Muslim traditions give greater importance to seeing God as the Transcendent and the Wholly Other. But none of the traditions absolutely excludes the other as many Hindu prayers to God and goddesses prove, and mystic trends in Christianity and Islam show.

Whether dialogue or discovery, prayer needs intimate attention and involvement of the whole person, and thus is characterized by the spirit of meditation. In this chapter prayer is primarily understood as meditation. All other forms of prayer are really prayer in so far as they are characterized by a meditative flavor. Prayer, whether it is performed alone or in community, vocal or mental, should always be a real prayer of heart and mind and, hence, meditative. Meditation is prayer par excellence. *Bhajans*, *nāmajāpas*, *mantras* and other hymns and composed prayers may be used for this purpose of concentrating one's whole attention on God, who is higher than the highest and subtler than the subtlest.

We have already seen that man, as he exists today, is mercilessly estranged from his own ideal, his own authentic self. He is not himself. There is an internal split within himself. He is disintegrated. This is the basic presupposition of all the major religions of the world: we are in a state of disintegration and need reintegration. Religions promise us also a way of reintegration. This is prayer or *sādhana*. The goal, however, is worded differently as liberation

²Ibid, lxxii

³*Chandogya Upanishad*, VI.9.4.

(*moksha*) from the bondage of *avidya*,⁴ *nirvana* or the cessation of the becoming which is *dukkhah*, and salvation from the state of sin. Along with other aspects of faith (which is not discussed here) they all speak of one means: prayer and meditation. By meditative prayer one integrates oneself. Integration is thus a healing, a coming to the wholeness of oneself. To reproduce an integral man is the great objective which religions have.⁵ And this is done through prayerful meditation. Psychiatrists and counselors heal man by helping him to get integrated. Religions do the same. But integration worked out in religion through prayer, is expected to go deeper, because religion enters with its healing power into the innermost recess of every man.

We all have heard about yoga. Yoga, with its eight steps known as *astangayoga*, is really helpful to produce an integrated man. In this context it is good to remember that many modern scholars translate the word *yoga* as integration.⁶ Yoga as presented in the *Bhagavadgita* is a process of integrating man within himself, as to bring him to his own authenticity.

Meditation and the Process of Integration

Man is a microcosm. In him is a world of knowledge, feeling and emotion. He has vegetative, sensitive and intellectual life. In the world of his feeling we find the expression of anger and affection, joy and sorrow, bitterness and complacency and so on. The varieties of his experience are centered on consciousness by virtue of which he is said to be, as Christians say, the image of God (Gen. 1:26) or as the Gita suggests (Gita 8-3), a spark of the divine. The

⁴For a comparative study of the predicamental situation of disintegration of estrangement from one's own self in Hinduism and Christianity cf. V. F. Vineeth, "Yoga and the Reversal of the Fall," in *Jeevadhara*, vol. VI (Nov.-Dec. 1976), pp. 537-551.

⁵In Christianity the redemptive act of Christ plays an all important role in delivering man from the predicamental situation of disintegration. This mainly consists in restoring the original nature of man and inviting him to authenticity. Man's response to this invitation in any form is his prayer.

⁶Cf. R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavadgita* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1972), p. 25. The word *yoga* is derived from the root *yuj* which primarily means "to unite" and is related to the Latin *jungere* and the English *yoke*.

human consciousness, therefore has God as its interior content. Although consciousness contains God in its innermost depth, it can easily turn away from its own innermost center and actually get immersed in the fleeting awareness of the fast-changing external world and the experiences it engenders at the outer layers of man's being. Thus his consciousness lacks depth. He may never realize his own interior depth which is the divine image he carries as the base and foundation of his own being, his own consciousness. Until he discovers it, he never discovers his true and authentic self. He misunderstands himself. He is in a basic *avidya*, misapprehension of himself. As this misapprehension is a separation from his own interior center, he is estranged from himself. He is disintegrated. In order to get reintegrated in his own innermost depth he has to bring his consciousness back to his own divine center which is the ultimate interiority of his consciousness. This is done through meditation.⁷

Meditation needs concentration. Concentration is the fixation of one's attention on an object of preference. The preferred object is known as *iṣṭadevata*. Concentration has the peculiar nature of drawing the subject into the object. Through concentration man gives himself completely to the object. He gets identified with it. Man becomes what he concentrates on. Through consciousness concentration channels the whole man into the *iṣṭadevata*. So also, during concentration, the object contemplated enters into the being of man and pervades him. So in concentration there is an outflow of the subject into the object and an inflow of the object into the subject. This outflow-inflow dynamism takes the awareness into a new realm of transcendence. Meditation becomes the experience of a transcendental awareness. Concentration leads to transcendental self-awareness which results from the fusion of subject and object. Thus the subject gets characterized by the object. In prayer the object concentrated on is God in one or other form, or

⁷Ramanuja defines meditation as "the continuity of the steady remembrance uninterrupted like the flow of oil" (*Sribhāṣya*, I.I.I.). Cf. also Vadakethala F. (Vineeth), "A Yoga for Liberation: Ramanuja's Approach," *Journal of Dharma*, vol. II, no. 1 (1977), p. 49.

some ideal or model related to God. Hence the subject characterized by the object in prayer is human consciousness characterized by divine consciousness. This divine consciousness which, as we will see, is ultimately based on the Word incarnate, is the innermost center in every man. Hence in the transcendental awareness of himself as the object, what actually takes place is that he becomes aware of his own innermost center. He discovers his authentic self.

In the state of transcendence man finds himself elevated, his consciousness ennobled and expanded. In this privileged moment, being actually withdrawn from the disturbing awareness of the senses, the mutual flow of the subject into the object is further intensified. In the end the finite self-consciousness becomes surrounded by and transformed to God-consciousness. It is no more the distinct ego-consciousness (psychologically at least, though the ontological distinction can still be maintained) but the consciousness of the authentic self whose present awareness is filled with the consciousness of God. It is a transformed consciousness which is "always formed by the form of THAT"⁸ (*sadā-tat-bhāva-bhāvī-tam*).

Meditation, therefore, includes concentration, transcendence and transformation. The ultimate goal of all prayerful meditation is the divine transformation of human consciousness. This transformation is at the same time the integration of man's consciousness in his own divine center. In the transcendental awareness of the divine, man brings the entirety of his being, the whole microcosm he carries, to his divine center. This happens even if he is not aware of it for the moment, because concentration, readily continued, draws the totality of man to what is concentrated on. Through the transformation of his own consciousness this microcosm that he is also gets transformed and integrated in his divine center. Even the world around him with which he is related and which constitutes his larger ego, is brought to this divine center, as the total man is channeled to it through meditation. Though the figure or ideal (both pertaining to God) concentrated on may cherish distinction from the contemplating subject, God being more in-

⁸Ramanuja, *Sribhāshya*, I.I.I.

terior to oneself than anything else, the actual awakening of the divine consciousness takes place from within. The consciousness gets enlightened (*becomes Buddha*) by the light of the indwelling Spirit, the *antaryamin*. This awakening is his own self-discovery and it is in this awakening that he finds himself integrated. The result is peace. The integrated man, as the *Bhagavadgita* puts it, is a man of steady consciousness (*sthitaprajña*).⁹ Serenity, peace and equanimity are his characteristic notes.¹⁰ Peace is the gift of integration as it results from ultimate harmony, coherence and synthesis. The integrated man is a man of peace. Christ said to his disciples at the time of his farewell: "Peace I give to you, my peace I give to you" (Jn. 14:27); and the Indian prayers usually end with the chanting of *OM shanti, shanti, shanti*: Om peace, peace, peace.

⁹*Bhagavadgita*, 2:57-59.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 6:7-9.

...7

THE WORD AND THE CENTER OF INTEGRATION IN MAN

In the last chapter we have seen that prayer, especially meditation, leads man to integration. This integration takes place in the innermost depths of man. We called it man's divine center. In this chapter we shall try to see the Word as this divine center in whom the whole integration is ultimately brought about.

The Christian Search for the Divine Center of Man

"In the beginning was the Word . . . All things were made through Him . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:1,3,14a). These verses from the prologue of St. John give us a clue to the understanding of the Christian idea of creation. Creation was traditionally understood, especially in the Christian scholastic thinking, as the production of things from nothingness. But the philosophical sense of the world has rightly judged that nothing can come from nothing. The awareness of this truth was clearly mentioned by Uddalaka Aruni as he was instructing his son Svetaketu on the "Science of Being."¹ In traditional Christian thinking also the idea was not so much of production from nothing, as the non-existence of the thing, before it is actually produced by the all-powerful agent of creation. Creation was al-

¹Chandogya Upanishad, VI.2.2. Cf. also J.A.B. Van Buitinen (ed. and trans.), *Vedārthasamgraha* (Poona: Deccan College Research Institute, 1956), Introduction.

ways understood as an act of God and an act only of God, though, as philosophy taught, God remained unmoved and unrelated, even after His act of creation. It seems to be philosophically sound, that God, being the fullness of being, does not depend on change and cannot be in a process of becoming in order to realize Himself. This thought forced us to think of a "from-nothingness-theory" of creation. The main purpose of this theory was to keep our God, who is "pure act" free of all change and the world from all shades of pantheism by the scars of which, according to many a Christian theologian, even the purest form of Hindu religion was vitiated. (Since this is not the place to evaluate such statements I do not enter into that problem.) But we can have a new look into the creation theory based on the Gospel of St. John and the epistles of St. Paul.

The language of revelation does not seem to be so much worried or overconcerned about the philosophy of the immutability of God. It plainly says: "The Word became flesh" (Jn. 1:14). The Word for John was God Himself as acknowledged in the prologue of his Gospel, and is traditionally understood as the second person of the Holy Trinity. In fact it is the reflected awareness of the Father Himself, the very consciousness of the Father, distinctly subsisting in the all-encompassing mystery of the divine Existence. Being the Father's own reflection He could say, "He who sees me sees the Father." The Word is the very interiority of the Father seen by the Father Himself, subsisting in opposition to His own character of being the source of all (hence the Fatherhood). Being divine consciousness the Word is the real agent of creation. "Everything that was made was made by Him." Let us see how we can understand creation as part of the process of Word's becoming flesh.

The "a posteriori" Character of This Inquiry

From the very outset it is to be very clear that what we are trying to develop here is strictly *a posteriori*, that is, strictly based on faith. It is not simply philosophical fabrications and *a priori* conclusions analyzing the nature of divinity. Our starting point is that God became man which is a tenet of Christian faith. Since we know from faith that God really became man (and in this chapter I am

speaking only to those who believe that in Christ we have the Word which is made flesh or God in human nature) we are trying to understand this great "becoming-process of God," the great divine event of Incarnation, which perhaps let God to creation.

Creation by God and Creation for the Word

If we look at the Old Testament description of creation we find creation as something that took place "in the beginning." "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" (Gen. 1:1). This looks quite natural and makes sense to the ordinary man. For man to exist on earth, there must be the earth first. There must be air, light and many other things he can live one. Hence in the order of existence the earth must be the first. But even in the Genesis narration of creation the emphasis is on man. God created the heaven and earth and all that is in it for man. Man was the crown of creation. The world was *for* man and was his dwelling place. Man was the first intended one and everything else was for him, was his accessory. This biblical picture of man-centered creation has striking parallelism to the Johannine presentation of the Word-centered creation.

The world was made for the Word. It was and is the dwelling-place of the Word-made-flesh. Jesus Christ who is the Word made flesh, is the real center and crown of all creation. As according to the Old Testament view creation is to be understood and analyzed in terms of man, so according to the Johannine view creation is to be reinterpreted and reunderstood in terms of Jesus Christ. Christ was the primordially intended one in the mind of God. The second Adam who was even before the first Adam was the real center of all creation. Since Christ is nothing but the "Word made flesh," God's own consciousness in visibility, the Word's becoming flesh was the central theme behind the whole process of creation.

Humanity as the Visibility of God

The Word was made flesh. The flesh according to St. Paul is the human nature in which the Word found its own self-expression. The Christian faith teaches us that the flesh the Word assumed, or

which the Word became, is perfect human nature, in everything like us except sin. Centuries of controversy have clarified this point and the earlier Christological councils of the Church have brought the doctrine of the Incarnation to clearer perspective. Very uncompromising is the Church's assertion that Christ, the Word Incarnate, is fully man and fully God. The Word made flesh means God really became man, allowing Himself to be associated with matter, or to *become matter* which throbbed with divine consciousness. "Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of man" (Phil. 2:6-7).

The real *kenosis* of the Word was not in dying on the Cross, but primarily in emptying Itself in a certain otherness, in a non-god form, namely, as St. Paul puts it, in the form of a servant. The servant is any human individual, as we all are servants of the Most High. The emptying was, therefore, in the form of human nature. Since human nature contained matter as its essential component, the Word's self-emptying was actually allowing itself to become also matter as it became man. No religion, it seems to me, has so boldly asserted the link between God and matter, founding the origin of matter in the very *kenosis* of the Word. This makes the Incarnation totally different from all other forms of divine epiphanies and *avatars*. The flesh is, therefore, the real human nature, the very same human nature which every one of us bears, with the single exception that in Christ, this human nature knew no sin. The nature of the sinlessness of Christ will be explained later. For the moment it suffices to know that the medium through which the Word "sought" to express Himself was our human nature. Humanity was the primordial medium of divine self-expression.² The Word which is the interiority of the Father exteriorizes itself in human form. Christ is thus the expression of the Father. Expression,

²According to the upanishadic thinking Brahman expressed Himself through *nāmarupa*. *Nāmarupa* (name and form) is the essential limitation structure Brahman assumed in order to express Himself in a possible otherness. If we follow this line of thinking "humanity" is the basic *nāmarupa* which God, the Word, assumed for his own self-expression.

as it literally means, is the pressing out of the internal content. The internal content of the Word, which is the Father's self-consciousness, was pressed out and the result of that pressing out is Jesus the Christ, God in human form. Christ is thus the Word uttered by the Father, the perfect Word made visible to us through human nature. Human nature was the primal image which God had in His mind as a possible medium of His own self-expression. In this image He created the first man: "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26). The image was that of the primal man, the first man ever contemplated by the mind of God, the Word to be incarnated. Therefore St. Paul rightly says that though the first Adam came to earth first, the Second Adam was even before the first Adam. The Second Adam was in the mind of God as the "First-born of all creation" (Col. 1:15). He was the primarily intended of all creation. Everything else was subordinated to him.

The Word as the Divine Center of Man

The human nature that was envisaged by the Word as the medium of its own self-expression was not a closed humanity. The Christian faith is not that the Word was united to a human individual. The faith says that the Word became man; the very manhood of Christ is the result of the Word's self-becoming. The becoming process of the Word is never questioned in faith. The "how" of that becoming is accepted as a mystery in faith, because of the limited capacity of the human mind, which often fails to see becoming without an inherent process of change denoting imperfection. The mystery of the incarnation is precisely the mystery of this becoming: remaining ever the same, the full expression of the Word as the Father, yet the same Word expressing itself as man, actuating and informing the finite human nature which the Word itself has become. Since human nature is the expression of the Word, it is most intimately centered in and grounded on the Word. It has no root but in the Word, no existence apart from the existence of the Word. The expression totally belongs to that from which it is expressed and can claim no existence but in and with that which has been expressed. This is perfectly so in the case of the human nature

of Christ, which, as the Christian faith teaches, does not have an existence of its own, but subsists in the Word's existence. It is only the expression of the Word, really and literally so. The Word is the real agent, the internal center of the human nature of Christ.

It is also a part of Christian faith as seen above that every one of us, sinful though we are, bears the same human nature as that of Christ. If the human nature of Christ is the expression of the Word, and if our human nature is fundamentally the same human nature as that of Christ, it follows that our human nature too is at least fundamentally the expression of the Word. Human nature as the expression of the Word is in Christ and also in us. Of course due to the immediacy of intention (as the primarily and principally intended) and the intensity of union with the Word, in Jesus this human nature realizes itself in a singular way which is perfect and authentic. Entitatively distinct from the Word's existence, our human nature contains within itself the possibility of distortion, of turning away from the divine consciousness, the possibility called sin. But designed as the expression of the Word, our human nature too contains in itself the Word, as every expression contains the expressed. Therefore, the Word is present in us not as something present in something else, but in a way very similar to the presence of the Word in Jesus Christ, that is, as the base or substratum of our being. Our traditional Christian conception of God as totally and wholly other has made God too extrinsic to us. But in truth it is not so. God is as immanent as He is transcendent. God is immanent in us not as someone dwelling in something else, but much more intimately, as the very foundation of our being. Ultimately our existence subsists in the existence of God in a way very similar to the mode of subsistence of the human nature of Christ in the Word. Our human nature, as it participates in the very nature of Christ, is centered on the Word, which becoming flesh, allowed itself to be the foundation of all flesh: all human nature, irrespective of its individual realization. We are, therefore, founded on the Word. We are the continuity of the Word's own self-expression. The innermost interiority of every man is, therefore, the Word itself. The Word is the divine center of every man.

Prayer as Integration in the Word

Though the innermost interiority of every man is really the Word, man is not actually aware of this fact. Human consciousness normally is only a fleeting awareness of the external world. Seldom does it come to its own true interiority, the Word, the origin and end of all that lies beneath human consciousness as the source of its very light, as the base of its very existence. Human consciousness, free as it is, can turn to the exteriority of its being and allow itself to be filled by the world of sensations. A man who does so will find his stream of consciousness fragmented by the isolated bits of sense experiences. Since he moves around in the gross-body level of experience, he never enters into the depth of his own being nor discovers the all-unifying center in him. In its own way, the Transcendental Meditation movement is trying to elevate man from the level of gross-body experience to a higher level of subtle experience of being. This being is supposed to be the ultimate foundation of our being and consciousness. Christianity with its theology of the Word lays down an excellent foundation for this. In the innermost layer of our existence, which is self-reflective and therefore consciousness, the Word is present as its all-unifying center. It would be more correct to say that the innermost layer itself is the Word. "He is the unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the unknown knower."³

He is present there as the silent observer, the witness, the *sakshin*,⁴ of all the activity of human consciousness. Nothing is hidden from Him, nothing is unknown to Him. Unaffected by the likes or dislikes of man, of the turning inward or outward of his consciousness. He is there awaiting the auspicious moment when man journeys into his own interiority, and He invites man to take that journey.

³*Brahadaranyaka Upanishad*, III.7.23.

⁴According to Sankara *sakshin* is the inner content of human consciousness which ultimately realizes itself as Brahman. We do not follow the same trend of thinking in an advaitic sense. However, the idea of *sakshin* as the silent witness who is interior to human consciousness and yet not affected by its process of becoming, points strongly to the presence of the Word, who is both immanent and transcendent, in every human consciousness.

The hearers of the Word's invitation are those who turn to their own interior. It is not necessary that they be aware of turning to their innermost center which really is the Word. Whenever they turn to God, to Christ, as that which is unconditional and ultimately meaningful, they are turning to their own interiority. They have to purge their consciousness of the impressions arising from the world of the senses, with which it is filled and orientate it toward the Word so that it may get charged with the Word. This is necessary since the Word itself is within this orientation which is ultimately to the interiority of its own being. Away from the fleeting awareness of the world, aflame with the arising awareness of the Word, the human consciousness now slowly becomes the Word consciousness. As human consciousness is originally the reflection of the Word, as all consciousness originates from the Consciousness that is the Word, in becoming aware again of the Word the human consciousness finds its own fulfilment and perfect authenticity. Since all knowledge is structured in consciousness, the transformation of man's consciousness effectively transforms his entire knowledge structure, and through that, his entire being. As we have already seen above, through his own consciousness he draws the entirety of his being to the Word making it Word-filled, then acts as a man fully integrated in the Word. The withdrawal from the world is not meant to foster a negative outlook on life and the world. Once it is filled with the Word, the mind returns to the world, to its every day life; but now with a new awareness, with the transforming awareness of the Word, with an integrated self, and, therefore, with a greater balance of mind.

(Christ himself is the perfect model of this integration. He is the most perfect union of humanity and divinity. In Him the human consciousness was well subordinated to the divine, always seeking the will of the Father who sent Him. The integration of human consciousness in the divine was unprecedentedly and unsurpassingly singular in the person of Jesus Christ, a perfect realization of the ultimate identity in existence. As the human nature in Jesus Christ does not enjoy, as the doctrine of the incarnation holds, a separate existence of its own the human consciousness of Christ had its ultimate reference always to the person of the Word. A

turning away from the Word was existentially impossible for the human consciousness of Christ, though in everything else it operated just as any other human consciousness. So the integration of humanity (of the human consciousness) with the Word was existential (ontological) as well as operational. This existential or ontological integration, i.e., integration on the level of existence itself (a higher level cannot be thought of) is theologically called the hypostatic union, a union in the person, in the person of the Word, in the Word's own existence. Likewise we term the integration on the operational level the impeccability of Christ. The impeccability of Christ flows from His own nature. Christ's own human consciousness, as it lacks its own distinct existence, cannot entitatively assert itself over against the consciousness of the Word. Hence it can never be separated from the Word, even operationally, and assert itself without the Word. It is one with the Word and becomes the manifestative mode of the Word's own operation. Christ is our model of perfect integration of the human and divine consciousness, in existence as well as in operation.

But with regard to man this is not the case. He is not in a state of perfect integration, either on the level of existence, or on the level of operation. But he is called to such a state. Called to participate in the fullness of Christ he is to work out within himself the integration that is of Christ. In spite of all the similarity and even identity of our human nature with that of Christ, it lacks one thing in reality: it is not yet integrated into the Word. This is because the human nature of every man, though conceived in and along with Christ, enjoys its own existence, which, though rooted in the Word as seen above is entitatively distinct in some way from that of the Word (which is not the case with regard to the human nature of Christ) and, therefore, capable of having a distinct awareness of its own, the assertion of which can either coincide with that of the Word (the integrated self) or rise against the Word (the self disintegrated from its own divine center). If it coincides it puts on Christ's own awareness and in so doing becomes in very truth another Christ. If on the contrary it rises against the divine consciousness, the Word, of which it is the reflection, it becomes the primordial symbol of pride (*hubris*), the self-assertive ego-consciousness.

(*ahamkara*) forgetting its own true and authentic self. In the traditional Christian language it is sin. The Hindu tradition describes it as the predicament of *avidya* (ignorance), because, radically seen, it is a misapprehension of one's own true self. Sin, therefore, is to be seen as a distortion within oneself, and it is wrong not merely because of a breach of a law established by God, but more because it is simply self-contradiction, as an assertion of a false awareness over against the authentic. As the Book of Wisdom says: "One who sins does wrong to himself." All major religions of the world find man in this state of self-distortion. The difference is in the way of explaining the distortion. This distortion, being very interior and intimate to oneself, is the basic disintegration in man. He needs to be reintegrated in the Word which is his own divine center.

The identity and difference of our human nature with that of the Word is a mystery in the Word Incarnate, and to a certain extent, is so in every one of us. Man's unity with God does not have any parallel or strict comparison. It is neither identity nor distinction. It is easy to take an extreme view and formulate a doctrine. But reality seems to be otherwise. The Christian tradition, in general, has stood for the distinction of the human existence from that of the divine. This, the Church thought, is the way to safeguard her doctrines from all shades of pantheism. At least one school of Hinduism, the *advaita*, has asserted the ultimate identity of the individual self with the Absolute Self, which is supposed to be the underlying Self of all. Ultimate identity in such a way as to posit the complete merger of the individual into the Absolute existence on an ontological level makes the whole process of becoming we now experience ultimately meaningless. Absolute distinction of our being from the being of God can also be equally meaningless, because once established to be entirely separate from God, nothing divine can be worked out from within ourselves. Grace, then, will be something coming entirely from outside. The idea of grace as "*donum creatum*" though, as it could rightly be understood, has exaggerated the externality of grace. If God is so external to man the reintegration (traditional terminology is sanctification) that is being worked out in man will not be within himself, but in terms of something outside himself, which is not integration. Nothing can

really be put into man from outside. What happens in the process of sanctification, and thus in the operation of grace, is that the awareness of the divine presence in man, the presence of the Word, which is kept blurred by super layers of consciousness, begins to become clarified, illuminated, and finally becomes his very consciousness. This awakening of the divine consciousness in us is possible and every one of us is called to that. It is in this context we have to understand what St. Paul said: "Now it is not I who live but Christ liveth in me." The identity of which Paul speaks can easily be understood on the operational level: here is a consciousness that is completely subservient and subordinate to the consciousness of Christ. But it may not be absolutely free of a certain degree of identity on the ontological level as well. Granted the distinction of human existence from that of the Word (which unlike Christ's human nature, makes every other human nature a person in the traditional scholastic terminology) since the human nature, as the expression of the Word, is rooted in the Word, it should have a meeting-point with the existence of the Word. This means, to speak in human terms, at one ultimate point our existence coincides with the divine. But this coincidence is not a convergence to absolute identity. Human existence, though rooted in the divine, is a finite expression of it, and the divine existence, though it allows itself to be the foundation (in Indian terms the ultimate underlying Self, the *antaryamin*) of the finite, remains infinite. The awakening of the awareness of this meeting point is man's discovery of his authentic self. Hence the nature of the union that exists between man and God is neither one of absolute identity nor one of complete distinction, despite the various assertions of theological schools. It is something in between these two, something to be contemplated and experienced, rather than to be articulated with strict philosophical precision.

This awakening of the divine consciousness in man is best achieved through meditation. Since the Word is the foundation of the divine consciousness, this awakening is the becoming charged with the Word-consciousness. Prayer in all its forms is ultimately meaningful and useful, as it leads to this awakening. One may concentrate directly on the Word that is present in oneself. But this

may be difficult, especially for beginners. They may need an object for concentration which is distinct from themselves. This is quite legitimate and can be well made use of even in advanced stages of prayer. One may start with any kind of meditation which one finds helpful for concentration and interior recollection. In the advanced stages of prayer one can certainly become aware of the presence of God within oneself and of the transforming power emanating from that presence. For a person in that state of awareness meditation becomes a process of self-transformation which can even rightly be termed self-actualization (*ātmasākshātkāra*). Since the true self is to be discovered in the Word, the self-actualization is, in the last analysis, Word-actualization within oneself. On its awareness level, the human consciousness gets completely transformed to Word-consciousness. "It is not I who live but Christ liveth in me."

Christ being the ideal and the perfect model of integration, meditation on Christ is certainly one of the best means of working out this integration within ourselves. Man becomes what he meditates on. "He who thinks Brahman becomes Brahman." One who concentrates on Christ becomes Christlike. He puts on Christ's consciousness. Though the concentration is on Christ objectively presented the transformation that takes place is really from within. Christ is our model of integration because in Christ the human nature is unambiguously integrated in the Word. When one concentrates on Christ he puts on Christ's consciousness which is a consciousness integrated in the Word and has become one with Word-consciousness. Since the same Word is present in man as his own inner interiority, the transformation into Christ-consciousness is in fact transformation into the Word-consciousness which is the ultimate center of his own consciousness. However the objectivity of Christ is a great help for concentration.

...8

THE PRAYING RELIGIOUS

Called to realize the Word in a very special way, the fundamental vocation of a religious is to pray. The religious finds the fulfilment of his vocation primarily in prayer. His life is a life of prayer from dawn to dusk and dusk to dawn. Having given his flesh to the Word by chastity, and his world to the Word by poverty, he has only one concern in life, that of listening to the Word and living in the Word which is the basis of his obedience. This careful listening, this concern to hear the whisperings of the Word of God in and through the crowded programs of the day is itself his fundamental prayer, the meditation which is his life. This does not mean the religious has to spend all his time actually praying in the sense of "saying prayers." Nor does it mean he can plunge himself into an unending flow of activities with no break for silence, solitude and the revival of interior recollection. The human consciousness, in its condition after the Fall, has a tragic tendency to be extroverted, to uphold the predicamental situation of alienation in which man finds himself from the day of his birth. Unless trained otherwise this tendency will continue and one may never reach his own interiority. The seers and sages, the saints and holy men of all times, have understood this and laid stress on "recollection"¹; that is, the gathering together in the wholeness of the individual that which

¹It is to be noted that Gabriel Marcel, the French existentialist, finds the authenticity of man in the second reflection which every man is called to make. The first reflection is the ordinary everyday awareness of man. The second reflection is coming back to himself. Marcel calls this second reflection: "recollection."

has been dispersed fragmentarily into his daily activities. Meditation has thus become an essential condition in any world of spiritual realization, irrespective of race and religion.

The religious is accustomed to meditation as well as to other forms of prayer. Very often the constitution of his order lays down rules and regulations governing his prayer activity. As a religious he is a member of a praying community. Committed to the same ideal, his fellow religious also are in process of realizing the Word in themselves together with him. Thus, they all journey toward the same ideal, toward the same goal of Christ-realization in and through prayer. In spite of this great insistence on prayer and in many cases prescribed programs of prayer, many religious do not feel the transforming power of the Spirit within themselves. They do not enjoy the experience of themselves as being centers of the divine presence on earth.

Of course, this may be so because of the fact that it is not necessary to be actually conscious about what is objectively real. But it may also be the result of a false formation in prayer. Many do not become mystics because they think that mysticism is not meant for them. It is too high for them to aspire to. The universal call to mysticism is often simply forgotten even by good, dedicated religious.² Instead, prayer becomes one of the prescribed programs of the day: once, twice or several times. Many religious do follow these programs faithfully, but whether they become their own prayers is questionable. In this context it is good to make an analysis of the prayer life of a religious.

The praying religious is an individual and a member of a community. In all his life these two dimensions intermingle harmoniously. As a member of a community he prays in the community, for the community and with the community. His inherent social nature agrees with the general nature of the community. But as an individual it is always *his* prayer. His personal thoughts and feelings are very important in prayer. Often he meditates alone, absorbed in thought. Sometimes he finds himself carried away by the Spirit of the Lord which is an intensely personal experience; such

²F.M. Podimattam, *The Primacy of Prayer* (Bangalore: ATC, 1978), pp.13ff.

moments of intense experience are of supreme importance in the prayer life of a religious. It is in those moment he receives a glimpse of his own realization in the Word, of his total life being led by the power of the Word. Often in prayer he finds himself intuitively illumined and emotionally effusive. In those moments he may be forced to rise above all the models and structures of prayer he is used to, and make his own prayer if needed, even vocally and in community. The prayer of a religious, therefore, has its personal aspects. In the personal there is the intellectual, intuitive or illuminative side as well as the affective emotional and effusive side. Accordingly we find three main orientations with which the prayer life of a religious is characterized: the *social*, the *intellectual* and the intimately *personal* consisting of affection, feeling, emotion and so on. All these three orientations are interrelated. The social type of prayers of a religious are certainly to be characterized by the intellectual and affectionate orientations. So also his personal prayer shall never be the prayer of a closed individual. The more intensely personal it is, the greater is the degree of openness and self-giving it contains. However, a certain characteristic note may be predominant in a certain type of prayer. Seen from this angle we may artificially divide the prayer life of a religious into three inter-related and interdependent zones: social, intellectual and personal. Any prayer to be true and authentic must be the prayer of the total person. All the three dimensions mentioned above must in one way or another be involved in prayer. But the prayer of a religious may fall short of this ideal and indulge fruitlessly in one of the zones. Hence the need of seeing the prayer life of a religious from the viewpoint of the zonal orientations.

The Social Zone

Many prayers said in the community may fall in the social zone. The divine liturgy, the divine office and many other community prayers of religious have a socialized character. One of the main characteristic notes of this type of prayer is that it has a set form. The prayers are already composed, and their form of recital is also often decided. They are quite often a matter of tradition and as

such contain great wealth of Christian prayer experience. So that they may become our prayers they must be personalized, bringing them to the other zones of prayer such as the intellectual and the personal. Quite often the prayers in the socialized zone can become merely routine. This is the great risk involved in this type of prayer. As a socialized form of prayer, these prayers prescribe rubrics and the participants are expected to follow them. Though the involvement of the entire person is expected and called for, the physical involvement of speech and the expression of sound are most obvious. This stress on externality which, of course, is a need in community prayers has the inherent risk of making prayer merely a program of repetition devoid of content. To avoid this risk it is highly recommended, as is being practiced in some communities, to have short periods of silence in between the recited prayers, and provision for improvised prayers. What we have to bear in mind is that even the best socialized form of prayer which we pray now, be it in the divine liturgy or the divine office, was originally a personal prayer of the one who prayed it first. All the great prayers now used in the Church came into existence as the expressions of the intense experience of those who formulated those prayers. They were the spontaneous outpourings of their hearts. Accepting them and learning the Christian spirit of prayer from these prayers, we should also be capable of bringing our own life situations into prayer as well as articulating our own experience in prayer. A religious living entirely in the social zone of prayer is really to be pitied. If asked, "Why do you pray?" he may with great sincerity respond: "I pray because the Church wants me to pray." The diverse versions of this attitude we find in such expressions as: "The Sunday Mass is an obligation under pain of mortal sin," or "The Constitution asks you to say the divine office daily." Anyway it is more of the nature of a command received than of a personal decision made. Of course, it can be and should be made a personal decision.

In the language of Transactional Analysis³ it is the Parent that is

³For the basic concepts of Transactional Analysis, cf. Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (London, 1968); Thomas A. Harris, *I'm OK—You're OK: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis* (London, 1970).

predominant in the socialized forms of prayer. The Parent certainly is an important component of an individual but the Parent alone will not produce a sound individual. The authoritarianism of the Parent is to be combined with the creative spontaneity of the Child so as to bring about the healthy synthesis called the Adult. This is true also in prayer. Too much emphasis on tradition, rubrics and ritualism will undermine the genuine spirit of prayer and make it a shallow show of ritual performance. Of course, a worshipping community needs a certain amount of ritual. But the manner and method of rituals must correspond to the level of consciousness in the community. This is why we need a continuing revision and renewal of the forms of worship and prayers in every religious community. Rituals are the external expressions of internal dispositions and attitudes. They should be natural and spontaneous. However, it is to be remembered that, centered around the mystery of faith, rituals often contain many elements of faith, which are to be carefully preserved also in the altered forms of worship. In preserving the deposit of faith handed down to us through the Christian tradition of prayer, the Parent in us does play a useful role. But mere imitation and repetition of what has been handed down is not the best way of preserving the deposit of faith. Preserving the faith in prayer is best done by imbibing the spirit of that prayer and integrating it into oneself. For this, other forms of ego states, such as the Adult and the Child must also be at work. The Christian faith is not primarily in books and rubrics but in the living heart of the praying man.

Seen from the standpoint of Indian ways of worship and self-realization, it could be said that the socialized prayers of a religious roughly correspond to *karmamārga*. *Karmamārga*, which is also known as *karmayoga*, is primarily a way of action. The action mentioned here, although in its widest sense and application comprises all activities such as the caste obligations of every individual, is primarily a ritual action. If this *karma* or action is to become truly *karmayoga* or a way of liberation, it must be done with a certain disposition of mind. This disposition of mind is generally understood as detachment or dispassion concerning not only the action itself but also the fruits of action. This state of mind is easily pos-

sible under the influence of other *mārgas* such as *jñāna* and *bhakti* (loving devotion).⁴ The disposition of mind is very important to the correct performance of action, especially of ritualistic action. Only when ritual arises from the correct disposition of mind does it have a liberating power. So also the religious participating in a socialized form of prayer has to be in a proper disposition of mind, appreciating and accepting the prayer form, and integrating its spirit into himself.

The Intellectual Zone

The praying religious finds himself also in the intellectual zone. He focuses his attention on the meaning of the words he uses to pray, or he attempts to penetrate into the significance of the ritual performance. This should be done so that the given form of prayer is made his own prayer. However, it is to be remembered that prayer is not study. Meditation can often be in the intellectual zone. The Ignatian method of meditation, for example, is predominantly an intellectual type of meditation. It is a good method, especially when used by beginners to train themselves in the discipline of concentration; but even in this method elicitation of aspirations is invited in the end. The risk in this zone of prayer life is the temptation to convert meditation into speculation and prayer into philosophy. Although it is good that an individual's prayer life be supported by a sound philosophy of his own — always depending upon the level of his consciousness — prayer as such is never to be confounded with philosophizing, not even about God. Prayer is rather the absolute and unconditional surrender of one's total self to the ground of its being, the Author of its existence; we called it integration. This surrender is expressed in various ways: by ritual, by meditation and by other forms of prayer. Since the surrender is total it includes also the intellectual zone and its inherent capacity to enter deep into the sense of the surrender made. If asked: "Why do you pray?" the man in the intellectual zone may answer, "I pray

⁴For a study on the three *Mārgas*, cf. Vadakethala, F., "A Yoga for Liberation," *Journal of Dharma*, vol. II. no. 1 (1977), pp. 35-52.

because it is reasonable to pray." The variations of this attitude of mind we find in such expressions as: "The creature has to adore his creator," or "I love God for He is good," etc.

In the language of Transactional Analysis it could be said that it is the Adult ego state that is more at work in the intellectual zone of prayer. The Adult computerizes the data given by the Parent and the Child and makes reasonable decisions. So also to have a wholesome prayer life, the man in the intellectual zone has to feed on the parental data—and this is done by meditations on the Scriptures, the *Vedas*, and other prayer forms—and combining this with the creative spontaneity of the Child. When man is carried away by the Spirit he is no more in the pure intellectual zone. He may even become blind and may have to walk through the "cloud of unknowing."⁵ He becomes more like a child giving itself to the lead of the Spirit without any resistance. In true prayer experience man certainly rises above the intellectual zone and reaches the ineffable.

Of the three Indian margas *jñānamārga* comes closest to the prayer structure in the intellectual zone. In *jñānamārga* what is really intended is not the development of the philosophical genius of man, but the awakening of the divine consciousness in him. To lead man to that long-cherished destiny, the intellectual power structure of man is made use of. The method of listening (*śrotarīya*) to the word of God, meditating on it (*mantarīya*), and contemplating it (*nīdīdhyā-satavīya*) is well known in the Indian tradition, especially in the *Advaita* system. But once the consciousness that is the Word is awakened, it pervades the entirety of one's being and dispels all distinctions. So also the praying religious, in the exact measure of his growth in prayer life, will find himself no longer concerned with or relating to any man-made concept of God, although he may still use it for the sake of communication. He is absorbed and thus totally integrated, in the one all-pervading consciousness of the Supreme.

⁵*The Cloud of Unknowing* is a medieval classic on prayer and the experience of God by an unknown English author.

The Personal Zone

Prayer which is social and intellectual has to become totally personal. This happens when the affective and the emotional sides of man blend with the social and the intellectual in prayer. The total involvement of the whole man and the blending of his consciousness in the consciousness of God is always the goal in prayer. In the everyday prayer life of a religious the improvised prayers made during the prayer services are attempts to make the prayer more personal, allowing expression to his own intimate, personal experience. These prayers may contain intellectual enlightenments, emotional outpourings, affective self-giving and practical decisions. As we have said, the total involvement of the man and the blending of his consciousness in the consciousness of God is always the goal in prayer. Meditation, especially in the advanced stages, can give us the experience of this total blending.

The risk in this zone of prayer life can be the sensuous desire for thrills, for heightened emotions and powers which are not essential to the genuine fusion of human and divine consciousness. So also a religious given to improvised prayers may sometimes be tempted to make superficial prayers with no proper content or depth of experience. This may be annoying to others, especially if they feel that the prayer is not emerging from the depth of his being. However, the feeling of affection and the pull of emotion are very important in prayer. In a certain sense affection and emotion are much more intimately personal than ideas are. Ideas can be separated from the man and can be discussed independently. Affections and emotions cannot be dealt with in this way. We cannot separate them from the person, even for objectivization. They are always one with the person, the very mode of his being, his very orientation incarnated in flesh. For this reason they belong more to the personal dimension—hence treated under the head of the Personal Zone—though the intellectual zone is also personal in its own way. The affective and the emotional sides should always be supported by the intellectual which alone gives them depth and the power to survive in unwholesome circumstances. Of course, in the higher realm of prayer all zones blend into one as man's whole being blends into one consciousness of the Divine.

If asked "Why do you pray?" a man in the Personal zone of prayer may answer, "I pray because I like to pray." The contrast is striking. It is not because I must pray based on the Church's command (socialized zone), nor because I have to pray as a reasonable being (intellectual zone), but simply because I find joy in praying. I pray because I like to pray. The variations of this attitude we can find in such expressions as "I will sing the mercies of the Lord evermore" or "Who can ever separate me from the Lord?" Neither the value of prayer inculcated by tradition, nor the obligation of it based on nature is discarded here, but over and above these, prayer is seen as an all-fulfilling experience, as that unique experience which makes me feel "more at home."

In the language of Transactional Analysis the Child ego state plays the most important role in this zone of prayer. Imitation and spontaneity are the peculiar characteristic notes of the Child. Similarly, the man in the personal zone prays of his own accord. Uninhibited, like a child, he gives expression to his personal experience of the Divine. His prayer is natural and spontaneous. In a well-balanced man the Child needs help from other ego states, such as protection from the Parent and direction from the Adult. So also the initiative and spontaneity of the praying religious is to be balanced by the rich prayer experience of the Church, as well as the mature thinking of his own mind.

Prayer in the personal zone, with its special flavor of affection and outgoing nature, corresponds to the Indian tradition of *Bhaktimārga*. *Bhaktimārga*, especially as it is understood by Ramanuja, the greatest champion of the philosophy of Bhakti, is a way of devotion, a way of complete dedication to the Lord with filial love and affection and with absolute confidence in the Lord. The way of devotion should be assisted and strengthened by the ways of action and knowledge. The prayer life in the personal zone, that it may remain totally personal, needs support from the social and intellectual zones of prayer.

The zonal division of prayer may look artificial and unrealistic. And it is so. It is made only to help us understand the working of our inner dynamism in prayer. It helps us also to see how overindulgence in one dimension of prayer may produce fragmentation

and not wholeness. Prayer as it works toward the total integration of man, brings together all the dimensions in man (social, intellectual, affective and emotional) combining and unifying them in the all-pervading divine consciousness. With this background now let us examine the different forms of prayer made by the religious in his everyday life.

The Divine Liturgy

For many religious a great portion of their prayer life is community prayer. As a member of a worshiping and praying community, community prayer of all kinds is very important in the prayer life of a religious. As personal prayer works out the integration of the person within oneself, community prayer can marvelously work out the integration of the members into the community of the Lord. The brilliant and most singular example of this is the celebration of the Eucharist, the gathering together of the community around the table of the Lord, with the sole purpose of offering themselves as victims to be sacrificed, and receiving the power of the Lord thereby. This reminds us of the first Christian community who were united in heart and mind and in the breaking of the bread of the Lord (Acts 2). But the celebration of the Mass, in spite of its great integrating power can sometimes become a stereotyped form of prayer, mere daily repetition. This is partially because of a rigid adherence to the ritual form, and partially because of the lack of personal endeavor to enter deep into the meaning of this unique celebration. Today, fortunately, the rigidity of attitude and adherence to ritual form is becoming to some extent relaxed, so allowing room for both traditional and personal expressions of experience. The celebration of the liturgy should be *our* celebration, the expression of *our* experience of the day. It is the best community-building act we can perform; so it should be experienced as such. However, it is to be remembered that the Christian religious community is not a community closed in upon itself, but a community situated in the heart of the Church. The liturgy, when celebrated in any community, because it is the integrating force of the community, at the same time integrates the community into the

whole Church, into the Christian community at large. The celebration of liturgy brings with it the awakening of a cosmic awareness in every one of us, reminding us of the wide range of relationships we have with the world at large in and through Christ. The communal awareness is not restricted to the human community of our time only, but takes us back to the beginning of Christianity, and to the pre-Christian era, in so far as the Christian liturgy is foreshadowed in other forms of worship, and toward the final consummation of time when everything will be gathered up in Christ in whom the cosmic integration will be led to its final completion. The celebration of the Eucharist, as it transforms bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, reminds us of this great cosmic integration to come.

Seen from this standpoint the Eucharistic celebration is an activity of great integrating power: when we integrate ourselves, our community, our Church, and the world at large into the Lord. Care should be taken that the Eucharist be experienced in this manner in our own life. However, though sufficient stress should be given to make it our own experience it always remains the sacrifice of the Church as a whole—the basic sacrifice offered by Christ Himself for His Church. For this reason, the sacrifice of the Eucharist, offered anywhere and at any time, remains fundamentally the same and the Church rightly insists on the traditional element being encapsuled in this prayer form and asks the faithful to keep it so. This is because the Eucharist is the worship of the Church from the beginning, it is the worship of the Church today, and it will be so until the end of the time. However, the Church allows adequate freedom for us to make it our own experience, an experience of our own integration with the Lord and His Church living in our times. Very often religious communities, especially those of women, depend on the goodwill of the priest who celebrates, to make the Mass an experience that is divine as well as human, that contains tradition but makes sense to the present as well. The contextualization of the Mass demands careful meditation on the content of the Mass, reflection concerning the situation in which the Mass is being celebrated, and consideration of the people for whom it is said. Many priests often take an easy path by saying only the prescribed

Eucharist

prayers in the missal, and in order to justify this, bring arguments against improvised prayers and other kinds of contextualizations (by way of symbolism, language, music and so on) being attempted during the celebration of the Mass. It is true that holy things must be done in a holy way; decorum and decency should abound in all their splendor. However, it should always be remembered that because it is the Mass of the Church it is also our Mass. Since we are the living church now, we have the right to experience Christ in our life situation and to express that experience in prayer even during the celebration of the sacred liturgy. This is our right as it was the right of the first Christians. The same Holy Spirit that guided them guides us today: "I shall be with you till the end of time." Since religious communities cannot always get the type of priest they would like to have, every religious should learn to make the celebration of the Mass a vivid experience for himself, irrespective of the manner in which it is sometimes celebrated. This is successfully done when one meditatively penetrates into the meaning of the Mass and brings one's own life situations into it. The Spirit will guide even the most uneducated soul to do this, provided he has the will to rise above the routine expression of the event. Many holy men and women of the Church are themselves living testimonies of the truth of this assertion.

The Divine Office

Next in importance to the divine liturgy is the divine office in the prayer life of a religious. At least three times a day many religious pray the prayers of the Church. The religious as a member of the praying community prays not only for himself but also for his world, the world which he has offered to the Word, the person of Christ, that the Christ alone may be the central power of operation in the world. It is only natural that he prays for the world. Just as his concern for the continual hearing the Word of God is a prayer for himself, his anxious awaiting to see the Word of God actualizing the whole world, is itself a prayer that comes deep from within his being. It is the pressure generated from within the being of man as the Word itself seeks to become conscious as man and his

world. From the intensity of his desire the religious always prays: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," not only in himself, but in everything else as well. Let all be integrated in One, in that great One to whom he has offered his life unconditionally.

The divine office is one of the best symbolic expressions of this authentic attitude of prayer in a dedicated religious. Praying the divine office, he prays in the Church, with the Church and for the Church. Through the divine office the Church introduces him to the rich experience of his praying Church. He sees, and is aided by the way the Church has prayed from the beginning and he tries to express in himself the spirit of the ever praying Church. Through the divine office the religious is also introduced to the ecclesiastical calendar by the use of which the Church keeps the continuity of salvation history alive in the hearts of the faithful. The divine office well prayed can thus be a great help in the formation of an ecclesial consciousness in the religious. However, as it was said of the divine liturgy, the divine office must be *his* prayer as well, his community's prayer, the prayer of his Church here and now. This vital aspect is often forgotten in the praying of the divine office.

So that any prayer may become our prayer, meditation and assimilation of what we pray is necessary. The divine office should be seen as something that can be meditatively prayed. Meditative praying is made easy if the prayer, especially its cultural settings, is congenial to one's own nature. Any impressions we have received in our early childhood lay down in us the fundamental traits of our further reception and it is through these channels we can quickly receive any message and assimilate it easily. Many religious in India are mercilessly deprived of this privilege. This is due to a false understanding of the real function of the divine office. It should always be the prayer of the Church, contain the rich experience of the praying Church, and help in the formation of Church consciousness in the individual religious. This could be achieved in a better way if the divine office were accommodated to the people who pray, to the melodies they are accustomed to, and to the patterns of thinking they are used to and brought up in. In short the divine office needs drastic changes in India, a country well known to the world for its meditative flavor in praying. The divine office

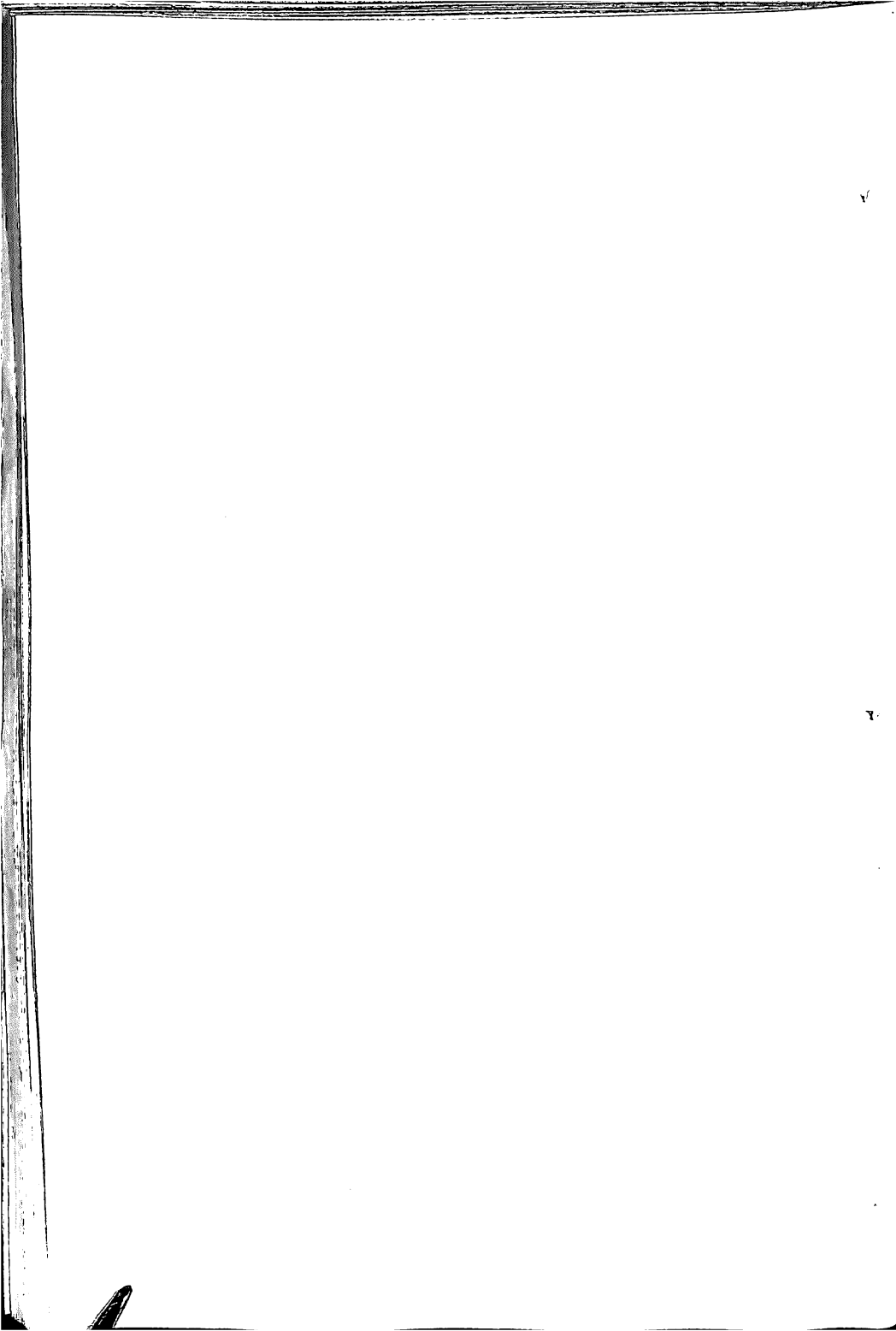
must be catholic in the real sense of the Word, accepting and appreciating all that is good in every culture and integrating it into the actual prayer life of the religious.

Meditation

Apart from the activity of community prayers, every religious should spend at least some time in meditation. We have already spoken of meditation and concentration in the preceding chapter. A religious has to become what he professes to be and meditation is the means par excellence for that. Whether done in community or alone it is essentially a personal prayer, a process of self-transformation. Both the divine liturgy and the divine office help this transformation process in their own way; but here too the meditative form of thinking and assimilation play a great role. The delicate care with which the religious attends to the Word of God, which constitutes the essence of his obedience, is nothing but real meditation. Ramanuja compares meditation to the uninterrupted flow of oil (*sada tat-bhava-bhavita*). The meditating religious is likewise uninterruptedly formed by the action of God, the Word Incarnate. The power of meditation, therefore, extends throughout the whole day throughout the whole life, rendering him capable of becoming Word-like in all his actions and seeing the action of the Word in all that he does. In this way he lives his profession. The surrender of his flesh and the world, his being and having, is upheld in actual consciousness through meditation. On this account the time ~~set apart for meditation~~ is especially precious to him. He considers it as the privileged time of the day, exclusively meant for the fusion of his consciousness with the divine consciousness. He longs for it and awaits it as any spouse would long for and await the exclusive union with his beloved. We have already seen that chastity has no meaning without mysticism. But mysticism cannot survive without meditation. Meditation, as it leads to the fusion of consciousness, is the real mystical bloodstream that keeps chastity always alive. By this we do not mean to undermine in any way the gift-character of chastity (only to those to whom it is given . . .) nor to belittle the work of grace that is essential for lead-

ing a life of perfect chastity. What we mean is that our prayer life is most fundamentally meditation and in meditation the religious finds a great fulfilment, as it always leads him to higher and higher realization.

It is advisable for a religious to convert the ideal of his congregation, which always will be one or another aspect of a gospel ideal, into a praying formula, well worded and melodiously composed as a mantra that can be chanted or sung, and meditated upon. The good religious is expected to meditate on this mantra daily until he is the meaning of the mantra himself, that is, his consciousness is completely transformed by that ideal. If this transformation has really taken place it can be remarkably felt by others. In one university campus in England, I had the good fortune of living with a few Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka. They reminded me always of the great Buddhist ideal of *karuna* and *maithri* (compassion and friendliness). I often wondered how this ideal had transformed them and made them so visibly the embodiment of these virtues. If all the Christian religious of India were similarly transformed by their ideals, that would be, I think, a great apostolic achievement in India. Of course, in the history of Buddhism we can see monks who were not always the embodiment of *karuna* and *maithri*. The important thing to know is that an ideal can really transform a person, and for this to happen meditation on and assimilation of that ideal are necessary. "To be formed by that form" we have to keep the form in our mind. Mahatma Gandhi once said to the missionaries of India: "If Christianity is a great religion, as it is supposed to be, it should have produced great minds." He said this because He could not understand the arrogance and the superiority complex of many missionaries of his time. This was so because their minds were formed by false ideals which sometimes were deep misunderstandings of the gospel ideals. But one thing becomes clear. Man is always formed by what he thinks and the way he thinks. What Gandhi said was not much different from what Christ said: "The tree is known by its fruit." The religious has to think and to concentrate upon what he has professed, what he has to become, until he becomes that. Then he has to continue the same meditative process so that he may not only retain what he has become but continue to grow in the becoming process. Meditation is the very core of religious life.



...IV

Community Life and Apostolate

Endowed with divine consciousness they live as a heavenly community on earth. They have only one mission: to spread this divine consciousness wider and wider.

...9

THE BOND OF BROTHERHOOD

The Bond of Brotherhood

Born on earth as a member of the human family, every man is called to lead a communitarian life. Human existence, open as it is to the other, is by nature communitarian. "God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity. So also it has pleased God to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness."¹ Religious life which fosters and flourishes in community is based on this divine design of the communitarian nature of man.

The Communitarian Nature of Man

Philosophically seen man is a social being, structurally open to the other. As we have already seen it is the presence of the other which renews our own self-awareness. Appreciation and identity consciousness in its full flowering is always a gift from the other. Man discovers himself in the other and learns to appreciate himself by the help of the other. This communitarian nature of man has deeper theological foundations.

¹Vatican II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*), art. 32; cf. also the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*), art. 9.

Theologically seen, it could be said that the most Holy Trinity itself is the prototype of the communitarian existence. According to traditional Christian theology the Trinity is that in which three persons subsist in one existence. The Father is Father precisely because of the Son. The Son, though the reflection of the Father, is distinct from the Father insofar as He is the Son. This distinction is overcome by the Spirit, who proceeding from the Father and the Son, is the uniting bond between them. The community life of the religious is in a way a reflection of this trinitarian life, where different persons, keeping their distinctions and authenticity in existence, allow themselves to be characterized by a unifying love force, by a bond of brotherhood. This divine bond, embracing all men, is especially seen and is founded in the person of Jesus Christ.

When God created man He created him in the image of Christ. Every man bears the form of Christ within him. The Word who is the person in Christ is radically in every man and works as a principle that unites all men. Because of this unity in primordial design and origin of existence, every man finds himself in the other, enjoys the presence of the other, opens up in the presence of the other and communicates himself to the other. He discovers himself to be communitarian.

Moreover, the communitarian nature of man helps him to understand Jesus Christ in greater depth and wider dimension. Jesus who is a fact of the historical past is also a living process of history and is revealed to us continuously through every human being. Formed and brought to existence in and by the Word, every man is in a way a revelation of Christ Himself who is the Word made flesh. Therefore man understands Christ not only in the historical past but also in the living humanity of his own times, in every man he encounters. Christ is the cornerstone on which the edifice of human community has been built.

Humanity and Particular Communities

Basic openness which is the characteristic note of the spirit in man is the ultimate foundation for any form of human community. Due to this openness humanity becomes a single family. How-

ever, since we see different communities within the one family of humanity, it is obvious that some other principle, which functions as a principle of limitation, enters into the actual formation of a community. This principle can be matter-bound or spirit-bound. Thus blood relationship functions as a principle unifying a few people so as to form a family, the basic unit of a community. Nationality is another principle which works out a wider community. The more matter-bound a principle is the less wide is its range of action. Spirit-bound principles, therefore, give rise to larger communities which may even transcend the limitations of time and space. Religious communities are born from such spirit experience. Though situated in time and space, and thus bound by history and culture, a religious community is formed and guided by a principle which is essentially spiritual and therefore capable of transcending time and space. Intense religious experience and the yearning for the Beyond and the Boundless has often been the primal nucleus of such religious communities. Thus the Buddhist experience of transcendence and timelessness gave rise to Buddhist religious communities in many countries. As a vision and a way of life emerging from an intense religious experience, such communities transcended the particularities of family and nation.

The Origin of the Christian Religious Community

The Christian religious community is to be understood against the background of the mystery of the Church. The mystery of the Church is understandable only in the mystery of Christ. The Church is the continuation of Christ on earth. As a community formed around Christ, the Church was primarily a group of people who experienced the mystery of Christ and participated in its transforming power. They found themselves changed. A new consciousness dawned upon them. A new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1) were formed around them. They found themselves in a new world. Transformed by the awareness of the Word they became a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). They went around proclaiming this good news, sharing to one another their experience of discovering themselves anew in the mystery of Christ.

In the last analysis the mystery of Christ consists in uniting divinity with humanity. In Christ we have the elevation of matter to its highest level of existence. The Incarnation is the unique mystery of this existential elevation of matter to the realm of divine existence. It is the mystery of the perfect integration of matter in Spirit, of humanity in Divinity.²

The Church as the continuation of Christ on earth stands for this mission of integrating all men to the humanity of Christ and thus to elevate and transform the whole universe to its divine level of existence. Therefore, she invites all men to participate in the Christ-experience, to enter into a new life, to get charged with a new consciousness. Religious life in Christianity is the flowering of this life and as such is "an increasingly clearer revelation of Christ."

The Church and Religious Communities

We see many religious communities within the one Church of Christ. The life of the evangelical counsels has assumed a variety of forms in the Church. The actual goal remains the same for all: to get integrated in the Word by living the life of Christ in greater depth, to guide the world to this state of integration and divine transformation. The religious do this by participating in the mystery of Christ, allowing themselves to be transformed by the new awareness of Christ-experience. The founders of religious orders and congregations are those who were really touched, moved and transformed by such a living experience of Christ. They witnessed what they saw, what they experienced. With St. John they could write to all their would-be followers:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — the life was made manifest and we saw it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete. (1 Jn. 1:1-4).

²Cf. above, pp. 88-89.

Yes, the founders saw and touched Christ though not with their physical eyes and limbs. The Christ-experience was not merely an idea or an aspiration in them, but a reality that filled their being and transformed their life. They were living witnesses of Christ.

But the founders of different congregations saw Christ from different perspectives. The mystery of Christ is too rich and profound to be experienced fully by any human individual. Every human experience has its inherent limitation. The content of the mystery of Christ, though it transforms and divinizes man from within, always transcends the limits of his experience. No founder can, therefore, claim to have founded a religious congregation expressive of all that is to be learned from Christ. ⁹In their own moderate ways founders developed their vision and life-style in accordance with what they saw, what they experienced. Thus St. Benedict saw in the Gospels a Christ praying in the wilderness while St. Dominic saw Him preaching to the multitudes. St. Francis of Assisi was inspired by the spirit of poverty He manifested, while many others like St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Don Bosco, Cyriac Chavara and Mother Teresa of Calcutta felt the need of continuing His mission of teaching, serving and healing the people of God. None of these visions excluded the other possibilities. However, the angle of vision through which they looked at Christ was decisive in shaping their communities. Accordingly the congregations they founded assumed different forms and developed different life-styles. They became different religious communities within the one Church of Christ.

Therefore, a congregation depends for its individuality, in a very special way, on the primordial vision the founder had, the struggles he had in materializing it and the way he and his companions brought this vision into reality. The vision envisaged here is always a vision of realizing the Christ of the Gospels in his own times and among his own people. It is always a vision of Christ-realization. Only the modality is chosen by the founder. As an original vision of actualizing Christ in concrete life-situations, this vision is hardly separable from its basic modality chosen by the founder. This vision together with the basic modality of its realization lays the foundation for what we now call the *spirit* of the congregation. The spirit of a congregation can hardly be defined in precise terms. Nor

can it be left to the fancies of the living members. The spirit depends heavily on the original vision and the original way of articulating it into reality. The present followers of the founder may not do exactly the same thing that the founder did, but they act under the influence of the same spirit. They participate in the same vision, accept the same ideal which, years ago, the founder had, and moved him to action. The spirit of one's congregation is, therefore, to be discovered by trying to experience in our own times what the founding members experienced in their times. With natural spontaneity the spirit will express itself in our lives according to the needs of our times.

The basic bond of unity of a religious community is, therefore, to be sought in the primeval vision and the ideal the founder had and by which his followers are expected to be formed. Thus each religious community is a community of people united and guided by certain ideals and goals. These ideals and goals are formed principally in and through the Christ-experience of the founding members and are always meant for the realization of Christ's kingdom on earth. Therefore, giving themselves to these ideals, the members of a congregation give themselves to Christ, to Christ's mission of transforming man and his universe.

Uniformity and Multiformity in Religious Life

So far we have been discussing the problem of many religious communities in the one Church of Christ. More recently many religious congregations have faced a new problem: a problem of accommodating themselves to a variety of life-styles within the same religious community. Traditionally religious communities were very much safeguarded from outside. They lived in monasteries which were declared to be "enclosures" and to which access from the world was either totally denied or severely restricted. They wore the same habit. They followed more or less the same timetable. The enclosure, the habit and the timetable, that is, a common house, a common dress and a common program of life were the three chief factors which helped them feel the unity and solidarity of their community.

These externalities, though not essential for the formation and the building up of the community, were really of great help at least for many religious. The new threat that many religious face now is the disintegration and the gradual disappearance of these external aids. Though certain religious congregations still maintain their traditional life-styles, we see a strong trend in the Church today to give shape to a new form of community life with less stress on these externalities. Thus the idea of enclosure has been drastically mitigated or even completely abandoned as in certain cases of new experimentation. Instead of living in a huge, enclosed monastery many religious prefer to penetrate into the life of the people around, share their lot and live among them in a house similar to theirs. Accordingly we now see religious staying alone or in small groups in the heart of a city either in a hired flat or in a simple hut in a dirty slum.

Similarly, the idea of having a uniform habit, though not abandoned by many congregations, is not insisted upon by many except for certain special occasions. The principles governing the habit are practically reduced to the congruency of having a simple and modest dress which can be very similar to that of the people around, but somehow expressive of the sense of dedication and the otherworldly character of the religious. For many religious an official habit is no more a working factor engendering community feeling.

Away from the enclosure and given to varied circumstances, many members of the community no longer follow a uniform timetable or a common program of the day. As all these externalities begin to break up and new orientations take shape, varieties of life-styles emerge within the same community. The religious, however, is a member of the community and needs the backing of and acceptance from the community. The new phases of experimentation have also new risks. Away from his fellows for a considerable period of time, and exposed to the world more drastically, the religious should not feel abandoned and lonely. It is a sad thing when the religious has to seek love and acceptance outside his community *because* he misses it in his own. At a time, when the community life of the religious is undergoing such fast changes, it is imperative to

think deep into the essence of our community structure and become aware of the real bond of our brotherhood. Formed and fostered by the vision and the ideal of the founder, the members of a congregation have become one, primarily by their commitment to the same ideal and not by the house they dwell in, the dress they put on and the life-style they follow. This inner bond of brotherhood should be stressed and strengthened; all the more so, at a time when external forms and aids are disappearing. Opportunities must be provided for the members really to feel and experience the unity of purpose they have, the bond of brotherhood they bear. Where members live in isolation or in smaller groups it is of great value to have an occasional day of family get-together. On that great day many of them (ten or fifteen working in the vicinity) as brothers committed to the same ideal and purpose, meet together, share their experiences, discuss their problems, get enlightenment and encouragement from each other and pray together for their common as well as personal endeavors. Given to the Word totally and unconditionally, enlightened by the vision of their founder and concerned about the people around, they all have one ultimate purpose: to realize Christ in and around them. Endowed with the consciousness of the Word and enhanced by the rich tradition of the same congregation, they are in a better position to communicate with one another, to understand and to be understood. When this way of life becomes a reality the individual religious begins to feel that he is in the heart of a loving community. The individual religious needs this support from his community. His communitarian nature demands this. Though integrated in the Word, and thus divinely fulfilled, his human nature looks for support, acceptance and encouragement from his fellows. The power of integration in him may leave him in peace and interior joy even if he miss them. Of course a religious must grow to that degree of equanimity and balance of mind. However every religious must think that he is a member of a religious community which is placed in this world of change and becoming. His community is shaped and strengthened, supported and sustained also by him.

Building up a Healthy and Timely Community

Modern psychology has proposed several programs for community building. Religious communities are becoming more and more aware of the great need of community building programs. But the formation and sustenance of any healthy community demand a two-fold death or *kenosis*: a death on the part of the individual for the sake of the community; a death on the part of the community for the sake of the individual.

The individual has to die for the ideal he has chosen. He has to allow himself to be transformed by the great ideal which ultimately is the ideal of realizing Christ as basically envisaged by the founder of his congregation. With St. Paul he must be able to say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). A group of people dying to their own selves and living in and for the Word build up a heavenly community. Two things never become one unless they both undergo some kind of transformation. In order that different individuals may become one community, they must be transformed by the spirit of the congregation. Hence above all psychological techniques and tips for community building, which of course are good and recommendable, the congregation must impart to its members the art of assimilating the ideal and the spirit of their congregation through prayer and meditation. The transformation of the individuals by the same vision, by the same ideology, in short, by the same spirit is the inner core of any living religious community.

As the *kenosis* of the individual contributes to the building up of a community so the transformation of the community may contribute to the growth of the individual. This is especially so with regard to congregations with rigid and outdated traditions and ways of life. The forms and patterns of life envisaged several years, and even centuries, ago may prove to be unfit for the needs of our time. They may even fail to express the very ideology they once stood for and thus miss the transparency of it. Such a community needs a death and resurrection with regard to its forms of life. This is the essence of all renewal in religious life. Unless the community allows itself to die it cannot resurrect into new life. Life will always be its

own life, the new flowering of the same spirit. The spirit is certainly subject to growth, though not subject to exchange.

The religious community is for the sake of the individuals. The individuals, if they remain unchanged, do not form any community. Hence the community should be capable of containing the individuals who are in touch with reality, and out of their authentic and reliable experience demand new dimensions and expressions of the ideal they have chosen. But the individuals on their part should conform themselves to the community by imbibing the spirit of the congregation, by assimilating its ideal, participating in its original vision and above all by allowing themselves to be formed by the consciousness of the Word.

...10

THE RELIGIOUS APOSTOLATE

Religious life is integration in the divine consciousness. Evangelization is the spreading of that divine consciousness on earth. The religious who is ecclesial by his very being and orientation is also missiological. He is dedicated to the service of the Church, to the mission of spreading the good news, of which good news the Church is the visible presence on earth. The religious is also the eschatological symbol of the mission of the Church which is the fulfilment of the complete integration of the whole cosmos in Christ. As a living symbol of Christ's love on earth, the religious, by the fact of his being, works as a powerful missionary. He attracts many to the mystery he contains and the meaning of life he conveys to the world. All the three vows he professes have their missiological dimensions.

Celibacy and the Apostolate

By the vow of chastity, the religious gives himself completely to the Word. He becomes one with the Word; he becomes the property of the Word. Becoming the consecrated property of the Word, he becomes the property of all since all is the expression of the Word. He is now on earth to give himself for others and to spend himself in service for the sake of others. This is his basic mission. As he is charged with divine consciousness, what he gives is human flesh made divine; he gives to the world a life that is totally divine. He spreads divine consciousness on earth by the fact of his self-giving, which, coming from a self that is totally consecrated to God is seen and accepted by others as evidence of God's presence in the

world. Through the devotion and dedicated service of the religious, God works wonders in the world.

The celibate self-dedication of the religious to the Word who has become flesh, naturally grows into a dedication of service to all who were conceived and contained in the flesh which the Word has become. As the human nature of Jesus Christ contained and contains all humanity, service to Christ takes its real form as service to all men. Different forms of apostolate bud forth on the tree of self-dedication to Christ. For so long as it remains expressive of the universal love embodied as the Christ any particular form of the apostolate will be appreciated by the people. The transparency of the dedication made to the Word, and so consequently made to the people must be made a standard when judging the methods and means of rendering service to the people.

A form of service envisaged in the beginning by the founder of a congregation may fail to have the same degree of transparency in later years. This may be caused by one or several factors. At a time when hospitals were few or at a place where none existed, to start a small dispensary for the cure of the sick in the locality was doubtless a severe challenge. It was all the more so because it usually meant a fight against the entrenched ignorance and customs of the people, and against the views and wishes of those who then held power over the people. A noble woman who set aside her life for such a purpose naturally would be greatly admired, and many young women of noble ambition would seek to assist her. In course of time it might happen that the small dispensary with its humble beginning and transparency of devoted personal service would grow into a huge institution. Then the first followers of the founder would have risen to the rank of executive administrators having very little personal contact with the sick and afflicted in the hospital. Many members of the congregation who administer the institution may now feel dissatisfied, because they no longer have the opportunity to spend time by a sickbed. It is this kind of dilemma that makes some religious seriously consider abandoning their huge institutions to engage themselves in some other activity which may be more directly expressive of their love and concern for people.

It may not be wise to abandon the huge institutions altogether.

However, every religious in his apostolate should be able to find some time for devoting himself directly to the needy and the poor, the sick and afflicted. Any form of apostolate is fundamentally the giving of Christ to another person. Christ is ultimately given and received in the giving of our love to another. Though the activity of maintaining the efficiency of an Institution at a high level is in itself an expression of love and concern for other people, one does not usually obtain full satisfaction unless one encounters other human beings directly. (Mother Teresa's new method of medical and other charitable service has become a great success, and is appreciated by many because of its immediate transparency of dedication and universal love.)

Another factor which dulls transparency is the growth of similar institutions in the locality run by the government as well as by private agencies. Government regulations naturally follow which often restrict individual freedom, and a spirit of competition may arise between institutions. Power and prestige associated with an institution may devour much of the universal love which originally motivated its activity. To look for new initiatives, especially in non-competitive fields, is always a welcome idea in the religious apostolate. In other words, the apostolic charism of the congregation should continue to be expressed in such a way as to find new openings for the original transparency which led in the beginning to the formation of the congregation.

Through the practice of celibacy the religious is called to universal love. But in reality love is always concrete in its expression. So the celibate apostle of Christ has to concretize in the world his universal love. Because it is potentially universal, this love should be available to all and no one should be excluded from his service. But in practice, owing to human limitations, the action and expression of this love will always be restricted to a few people. These few, in whom all are symbolically contained, concretize the world of his universal love. These are the ones for whom he actually spends himself. They are dear to him and should be remembered very personally, especially in his prayers. The celibate apostle projects and inhabits a world of love, a real world of love. The beauty of this world of love is that it is not a closed world; it is open to all. Given

the proper circumstances, the religious will allow anyone to enter into the circle of his love. "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundred fold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mk. 10:29-31).

Poverty and the Apostolate

The religious who decides to remain "poor" for and in the Lord decides thereby to integrate his universe in the Word. What he envisages is the establishment of a world which is given to the Word, given to the working of the divine consciousness on earth. The divine consciousness had its most exquisite expression in the flesh of Jesus Christ which was totally human and suffered and died for the creation of a more human world. The Word which became flesh became human nature in Christ. But the flesh in man, because of his disintegration, made what is human less human or even sometimes inhuman. The world in which the flesh has been placed participated in the downfall of human consciousness and became a world which is far less human than it could be. The religious who gives himself to reintegration by that very action dedicates himself to make the world more human, more expressive of the divine consciousness as it had been originally designed. In effect the religious stands for the creation of a world of Christ which is more just, more friendly, more peaceful. Poverty as cosmic integration is, therefore, ultimately the creation of a world of Christ. This creative giving of self is the very core of any apostolate.

Transparency of universal love was shown to be a necessary standard in all our caritative activities which have a basis in celibacy. In the same way transcendence over all that is material or worldly must be considered as a golden norm for the efficient apostolate of cosmic integration emerging from the vow of poverty. The high degree of transcendental freedom, which the religious acquires by self-emptying, places him in a privileged position to dispose of all that he has, his total world or larger self, for the sake of the poor

and the needy. The same transcendental freedom characterized by the unselfish earnestness of apostolic purpose gives him courage to raise his hand against what is unjust in this world, especially in the locality in which he lives. The sense of transcendence emerging from kenosis, and the utter unselfishness that is in him make him capable of repudiating the evil he finds, with strength and without compromise. At the same time, the transparency of transcendence in him gives greater strength to his activity (before the people). India is a country where the vast majority of people are still forced to live below the poverty line and where many of them are systematically exploited by the rich and the powerful. A doctrine of cosmic integration does not make much sense unless something is being done effectively to liberate the people from this situation. A more just world, a more Christian world must be the goal of every religious who has given his world to the Word or consecrated it to Christ.

Obedience and the Apostolate

Every man is concerned to realize and develop his own possibilities. The religious who has vowed obedience is concerned to realize Christ in himself and in his world. Religious obedience is, therefore, essentially missiological. To see the Kingdom of God realized in this world and in every detail of its life, is the cherished goal of the consecrated religious. Whatever he does under obedience has this fundamental missiological character. Listening to the whisperings of the Word attentively, and perceiving them correctly through the inspiration of the Spirit, the aspirations of the people, and the signs of the time, the religious bring Jesus to the people around him. Jesus is present in everyone as the embodied Word who laid the foundation for human flesh. Committed to listening to and realization of the Word, the religious perceives the presence of the Word in everyone around him and unveils the face of Jesus hidden in every human being. He does this through the various apostolic activities to which he is called by obedience.

The Word came to the world as sent by the Father. He took flesh and was born on earth in order to reveal the consciousness of the

Father. He was the first missionary in whom the Father was especially pleased. He was the very transparency of the Father. Religious who listen to the Word participate in this missionary task of Christ which is revealing the consciousness of the Father to the world. As the Word-made-flesh had no other concern but to fulfil the will of the Father, so the religious given to the Word, has no other concern but to realize the Word within himself and communicate it to others. He is a missionary by the very nature of his being. All his apostolic activities will be motivated and led by this concern: the concern of spreading the consciousness of Christ which is the consciousness of the Father communicated to us. Together with transparency of universal love and transcendence over matter his apostolate emerging from obedience will be especially marked by a spirit of unconditional unselfishness and uncompromising devotion to the Word. He will be seen and judged by others as a man of great interiority who dedicates himself for the welfare of others.

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THE INTEGRATED RELIGIOUS

The prayer life of a religious brings about his integration in the Word, in the person of Jesus Christ. He is then an accomplished religious (*yukta*). The result of this accomplishment is happiness, a sense of fulfilment and an interior peace. He is basically content. Profound joy and an abounding sense of satisfaction well up from the depth of his being. This joy can never be separated from him. His consciousness opens up in the intimate presence of Divine, just like any human consciousness flowers in the presence of the beloved. He is never "single" because being fused with the divine consciousness he is always "together." The intimacy of this togetherness is beyond comparison and description, because of its profundity and inwardness. In his outward articulations he may choose either of the mystical languages, enstatic or ecstatic, and both are valid because the nature of man's union with God leaves foundation for both. On the one hand he may find it in the experience of the divine presence within or as the passionate desire of a bride to be united with her beloved. What is most fundamental is the sense of fulfilment it brings about. The accomplished religious is happy because he has found his mission, discovered the meaning of his existence. He is happy also because he is established in God and God is established in him. And he knows that nobody can separate him from this all-fulfilling, blissful awareness. With St. Paul he asks, "Who will separate me from . . . Christ?"

The sense of contentment lying deep in the innermost layer of the fully integrated man's existence is the unending source of his joy. He may have to suffer very much, and usually he has to by way

of pain, rejection and even contempt. But he is still capable of showing to the world a smiling face which is simple, sincere and open. This expression is symbolic of what he internally is. This does not, however, mean that he does not get irritated at all, feel sorrowful at times, or even cry out his sorrow. But in spite of all this he remains internally content and because of that he calmly rises above such predicamental situations in his life.

This internal contentment arising from the sense of fulfilment is very necessary in religious life. Nothing can substitute for this. Today much is said and many discussions are held about the personal fulfilment of a religious. This, of course, is a healthy trend. The religious is to be seen as a unique person, as one to be personally attended to and cared for. But this kind of personal fulfilment sought in particular fields of apostolate as well as in loving attention from his fellow religious, good and desirable though it may be, can never be a substitute for the authentic contentment of a religious which he obtains from his union with God, with the Word, with Christ. It is sad to see many religious, given to the Word though they are, grumbling about trivialities because they have not yet discovered the Word in themselves, nor begun to relish the happiness arising from self-giving. Such a religious finds cause for complaint everywhere, unearths problems from all life-situations, grumbles over them all through his life. Because of this expression of his character he becomes a real problem for his community. The core of the problem is that he is not basically happy with his fundamental option of being a religious. This sense of uneasiness is projected to everything around him. Such a religious should either leave the religious life and find his happiness elsewhere, or try to discover the authenticity of his vocation and be happy in the given situation whatever it be. We have already seen that according to Maslow the sense of fulfilment on a high level can help one forgo the needs on a lower level. In a community of mutual respect and acceptance, one may easily put up with an occasional inconvenience in accommodation or uneasiness arising from certain undesirable food for example. An integrated religious, because of the intensity of the sense of realization in him, can even rise above the need for esteem and acceptance. This does not mean that the inte-

grated religious does not care for mutual respect and acceptance. On the contrary he encourages and fosters them. But given the context of being rejected by his own fellow religious, he is not totally upset nor absolutely lost. Sorrowful though he will be, he keeps his balance and finds his joy and peace in the truth that he is accepted by the Lord who is his sufficiency.

The radical contentment arising from his union with the Word, makes the religious largehearted and magnanimous. He never spends his time calculating what he misses and others gain. On the contrary, characterized by Christ's consciousness, his vision is wide and open, allowing ample freedom of expression to everyone. He sees and rejoices in the mysterious way the Lord is working in everyone.

Basic contentment and satisfaction produces undisturbed peace in his being. Serenity of mind is an important characteristic of an accomplished religious. Founded on God, and being actually aware of this foundation in an experiential manner, the integrated religious is undisturbed. He is in a stage of steady consciousness (*sthitaprajna*). He keeps perfect balance of mind in all situations of life, irrespective of their pleasing or displeasing nature. Fearless he stands in all his engagements, for he is founded on God and anxiety has no room in him. Anxiety, which breaks down the core of a man's being, is really the response to a threat of non-being. In man there is always the possibility of becoming anxious because all his being, created as it is, carries within it the possibility of non-being. The integrated religious is well aware of this. But on account of his rootedness in God, who is beyond the threat of all non-being, he rises above all anxiety. He acknowledges his littleness and even nothingness—without God. But he is also aware of his greatness with God. He is humble, but courageous. Fearlessness surrounds his being. A true sense of fearlessness is characteristic of an authentic religious. Established in God, integrated in the Word, he now sees the radical imperishability of his being, though he knows all that he has, including his body, is moving toward death and decay. "Fear not, ye children of God . . ."

Fearlessness brings along with it the freedom of spirit which the accomplished religious now enjoys. He is not a slave of any law or

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any system. Christ has liberated us from the slavery of legalism. This was the great contention of St. Paul. We come to relish this spirit of freedom which Christ Himself has give us only in so far as we come in direct touch with Christ's own consciousness. The integrated religious, charged with Christ's consciousness, skillfully reads the signs of the time and perceives the whisperings of the Word, which is the basic Law of his life. With a spontaneous intuition he quickly grasps the inner sense of rules and regulations and abides by it. He is obedient to God's operations through human hands and tries to see meaning in all, since all meaning comes from the Word, the ultimate foundation of all meaning which consciousness he now shares.

Fearlessness and serenity of mind go hand in hand. Dispelling of anxiety and eradication of all sorts of fear are necessary preconditions for serenity of mind. Wherever spirituality has developed to its heights it has also evolved the notion of internal serenity and peace. The Greeks developed in in *Hesychism*, the Russians in *Pustinia*. The *Bhagavatgita* calls it *Stitaprajna*. In effect they all speak the same: a sense of contentment and joy, freedom and fearlessness, serenity and peace.

Internal contentment containing true joy, freedom of spirit dispelling all fears, and the serenity of mind resulting in peace are the characteristics of an accomplished religious. Although differentiated they are not separate one from another. They are only different aspects of the basic mentality of an integrated self: the state of undisturbed peace. It is this peace Our Lord promised to us: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." By the unique integration of humanity in divinity, of flesh in the Logos, He has established peace on earth in a singular way. Each one of us is called to share this peace and make it our own. And it will be ours as we get integrated in His consciousness, in the Word.

May the Lord, the Word who has become flesh as we are flesh, bless all the readers of this book with the gift of His peace.