

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION: SOME NOTES ON AN APPROACH

The Christian tradition has never been without the reality of meditation, even if it was not always called by that particular name. In fact, Christian meditation finds its roots within the Judaic tradition of Old Testament times¹. These Jewish approaches remained within the early apostolic era until a closely related phenomenon arose with monasticism: the « lectio divina »². Very similar to the scriptural « ruminatio » or mulling over of the Sacred Scriptures in one's heart and mind, the monks of the first twelve centuries in particular kept the primitive practice of Judaism alive. By the fourteenth century, with the advent of the « devotio moderna », meditation becomes more and more a systematised with the emphasis being put upon an intellectual dimension³. This climaxed with Sts. Ignacio de Loyola (1495-1556) and François de Sales (1567-1622)⁴. The approach of these

¹ Actually, very little study on the history of Christian meditation as a whole has been done, and even less on the scriptural roots. Nonetheless, we do have the following works which must be considered as basic to any further study of meditation in scripture: Emmanuel Von Severus and Aimé Solignac: « Méditation. De l'écriture aux auteurs médiévaux », in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 10 (1978) col. 906-914. (Hereafter referred to as DS). One should also examine Aimé Solignac: « Mémoire » in DS 10 (1978) col. 991-994; and O. Michel: « Mimneskomai » in Gerhard Kittel: *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament*, (translated by G.W. Bromley) vol. 4 (1967) p. 675-683.

² Cf. Jean Leclercq: *L'Amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu*. Paris: Cerf. 1957, p. 21-23; « La Lecture divine », in *Maison Dieu* 5 (1946) p. 21-33; Jacques Rousse: « Lectio Divina et lecture spirituelle », in DS 9 (1976) col. 470-487; Fidelis Rupert: « Meditation-Ruminatio. Une méthode traditionnelle de méditation », in *Collectanea Cisterciensia*, 39 (1977) p. 81-93.

³ Cf. Pierre Debonguie: « Dévotion moderne » in DS 3 (1957) col. 727-747; Mathias Goosens: « Méditation — La 'Devotio Moderna' », in DS 10 (1978) col. 914-919; A. Hyma: *The Christian Renaissance: A History of the Devotio Moderna*. Hamden Conn: Archon Books, 1965 (2nd ed.).

⁴ Cf. Ignacio Iparraguirre, ed: *Obras Completas de San Ignacio de Loyola*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968 (2nd ed.), consult in particular p. 209-211; also François de Sales: *Introduction à la vie dévote*. Tours: Mame, 1933.

latter two personalities ruled, in fact, the practice of Christian meditation well into our own twentieth century. However, with the renovations brought about by Vatican II in the area of a lived theology, a fresh approach to the question of meditation is being taken in various sectors of the Christian churches today.

In the last twenty years, Christianity has undergone almost incredible changes in practices, approaches to problems and life itself. Meditation was certainly not one of the first realities to experience scrutiny and change, but in the last six years, it has received a good deal of attention (even if it requires much more study and examination in an historical perspective and its praxis). Various sociological and religious elements and movements have contributed to the contemporary interest in meditation. Interest in Eastern religions and their meditative techniques, transcendental meditation's immense popularity, charismatic prayer groups and the movement itself as a whole, the strength of the integrist or fundamentalist movements: all these have brought renewed interest and sometimes change in the concept and practice of meditation.

There is one work especially which seems to have had a good deal of popular appeal, and therefore much influence. It is that of Morton T. Kelsey: *The Other Side of Silence. A Guide to Christian Meditation*⁵. This article would propose to look at his work to examine what he has to say about meditation in the Christian perspective today. We will examine the meaning and purpose of Christian meditation as he presents it and follow this by a critique of those ideas and the underlying assumptions in his particular theory.

MEDITATION: WHAT IS IT?

Really, it is throughout the whole of his book that Kelsey attempts to say what meditation is. He has adopted a very particular style in trying to delineate parameters of the meditational experience for the modern reader. Rather than going directly to the core question, Kelsey opts for another approach. That movement is very much like a dance. Starting at the outside perimeter, he brings the reader forward, to and fro, from several perspectives. Each time he presents a dimension of meditation with its own special nuance. So it is that in trying to come to a clear view of what he says, we must

⁵ Morton T. Kelsey: *The Other Side of Silence. A Guide to Christian Meditation*. New York: Paulist Press, 1976. From this point onward, the reference to this work will be given in the parentheses in the text rather than in separate footnotes, with the exception of additional cross references.

look at various elements which he presents throughout the work. And it must be said, that it can be a fascinating adventure if not always without problems.

Early in the book, Kelsey provides us with the key concept which colors the remainder of this particular work. He expresses it this way:

« It is easy enough to say that God is seeking us, and even to stress how central this understanding is to Christianity. But it is harder to realize that we have to prepare so that God can break through to us. *Meditation* is simply the way we prepare, setting up the conditions that can help to make this possible » (p. 8).

According to Kelsey the human person has avoided real contact with God. Why? Essentially, it is because this person has lived too much in « this world » and has therefore failed to pay attention, in any effective way, to « that world ». God needs to break into our world in order to make humanity aware of another world in which He lives. The implications of two worlds are here in this quotation. The reason why God must come is because having lived an almost purely sensual life, the human person has placed the self in such a situation that one can barely see or hear God. If God is to come and to speak, there are certain barriers which the human person has set up and which must be removed to allow for the divine revelatory process. For Kelsey, on an individual level, this means that one must willfully pay attention, concentrate on what is not material or physical. In other words, one must look directly at the spiritual world and come to realise that there is, in fact, another dimension to life, to human life. In reflecting, in going deeply into the inner world, the human person stops his/her ordinary way of being. Kelsey notes how many people have turned to Eastern prayer forms and techniques « ...in an effort to find some reality or experience beyond the immediate one » (p. 13). The experience of the « immediate one » entails ordinary things like the routine experience of eating, hearing noises and the like. However, for Kelsey that experience also has deeper roots and consequent effects. Because the person has been part of a rationalist tradition where intellectual knowledge is the key way of knowing, a more total experience has been left aside (p. 158). As a result, the human person looks at various religious elements such as dogma and moral regulations in a rather static way. The experience of dogma is objective and not dynamic. The experience of morality is the experience of a law, not a way of living. The immediate experience of Church is an experience of authority, not a community (p. 156)⁶. As a result, the person never really comes to know reality

⁶ Even at this early stage we should underline that what Kelsey says here.

in any real sense, much less a full sense. The person must be aided to break out of this one dimensional view of existence. Kelsey tells us that one very important instrument for this is meditation. The function of meditation enables the human person to open the self to another world, to another reality «...in which God can touch us far more directly than in the physical world » (p. 8).

As such, meditation must be viewed as a technique to entering this non-physical realm. However, this technique is not simply an ego connected experience. It indeed has something to do with an other:

« Meditation is the practice, the art of letting down the barrier that separates one's rational consciousness from the depth of one's soul » (p. 37).

Once more, being viewed as one who has dulled sensitivity to the spiritual part of existence, the human person must learn to look into the very core of who one is: one's soul. So it is that meditation will be essentially that practice in which and through which the human person enters into relationship. This is a dimension of meditation which is most important for Kelsey. Meditation is an encounter. Basing ourselves upon what he says in the phrase we have just quoted, we can say that for him, meditation is an encounter with the self. This is important for « We have the ability to shut ourselves off from the depth of our own being and avoid knowing our real selves, but this is not the religion of Jesus Christ » (p. 159). Through a variety of means (most often conscious ones) the human person is able to hide from the true self. Thus, activity of any sort, work, emotions, sickness and other such things enable the person to be sufficiently preoccupied to be incapable of looking and actually seeing who one really is. As one meditates, however, (and this despite whatever the practice of meditation might be for any given individual) the soul is provided «...with a proper environment in which to grow and become » (p. 31). That « rational consciousness » now comes to the surface enabling the person to see more the total self

about the ordinary experience is true. He has grasped the situation of contemporary humanity. He rightly notes that we are indeed one dimensional beings, when we could have a richer existence by opening ourselves to the greater dimensions of our lives. We are indeed more than intellects and objective creatures. We are human beings with hearts, minds and intuitive capabilities (p. 153). In short, we have a spirit. However, there is something about his attack on « imageless prayer » (p. 157-158) and his accent on dreams (ch. 13) which should make the reader wary. The last part of this study will look at the reasons for this hesitancy.

he or she is. So it is that in coming to see and to know more than the physical world, the soul is opened to itself in a new discovery of the possibilities for development of that very self that one has come to see.

Yet, this development is not and cannot be for Kelsey an isolating experience, as one might tend to think from what we have just said. It is not, in other words just a « finding of the self ». Far from it.

Meditation is an encounter, but an encounter with ANOTHER as well as with the self. Kelsey clearly establishes this idea from the very start when he clarifies and presents his notion of prayer to the reader. Rather than conceiving of prayer simply as petition, he notes:

« In meditation, on the other hand, there is a fresh emphasis on prayer as one way of meeting and relating to the One whom one prays. Meeting God and learning what God wants of us becomes far more important than what we want of God » (p. 9).

Meditation is never a vacuous experience. The focus is on God in the process of coming to know Him in a more complete way than ever before. « Meeting God » is an encounter which is more than just « knowing about » Him in some intellectual pursuit. Kelsey considers it more of a total experience in which the person has a real insight into God and that living relationship with God is seen as a personally dynamic one: the meeting of a person with a person (p. 51). Within this dynamic encounter then is implied necessarily the whole direction and moral tone of one's own personality: « ...learning what God wants of us ». While in the prayer of petition for example a person seeks something for the self, in meditation one is not seeking « what we want of God » so much as God Himself.

The person in meditation is tending to a totally outward thrust which is the encounter of another. Moreover, that person toward whom one is moving is not just some vague deity. « Through hope the inward way has direction and a goal, and Christian meditation becomes a process of discovering the reality of the loving Father revealed by Jesus Christ » (p. 78). To meditate means for the Christian to find the Father who has been made known in Jesus the Christ. The finding of this Father will be accomplished through a series of practices which are inner in nature and which have to do with the imagination, mind and heart of the person involved. All practice and technique is in fact geared to this one overriding dimension of discovering the Father who has been shown in the humanity of Christ.

This implies, as we have noted, a growth process which is

brought about by the contact with the Other. Kelsey affirms it in this way:

« The goal of Christian meditation is to bring the creative power of the Risen Christ to bear upon the totality of our confused inner being. In this way growth can begin and one can keep moving toward wholeness which is one of the marks of the sons of God » (p. 175).

The meeting of the other actually puts one into proportionate contact with that grace of Christ risen who then is able to heal the meditator in a gradual fashion. It would seem by this, and by all that we have said, that Kelsey sees meditation as the way out of an ego-centric slavery through the discovery of the Father; this being a discovery which is more than intellectual. So briefly we can say that for Kelsey, meditation is a technique of growing consciousness of the true self which is a preparation for hearing God. Yet, it must not be forgotten that for him it is also and primarily so, an encounter with the Father who in Christ's power gives growth to the person. In short, we may say that meditation is an experiential movement in which the human person is essentially becoming more sensitive to God, to the self and to the world. And all this so that the person may be freed from a vision of things which is too physical. Meditation provides this possibility of self-discovery and actualization of the self, but it also does more.

It is not only the self that is known in meditation. A whole new world view can and perhaps should result:

« One of the most important reasons for developing meditative techniques is to open us so that we can see realities from which we have been cut off by today's single-minded intellectual objectivity » (p. 146)⁷.

Whatever techniques are used in meditation, the process gives the meditator the opportunity and the means to look at experiential reality more clearly. For example, a particular person may be thoroughly involved in one's profession. Thus, too often everything that enters one's mind is related to that particular profession as it is being exercised at that time. Then, we discover that that person's

⁷ Cf. also p. 150 where Kelsey says: « One of the main purposes of meditation is to break out of the ordinary secular way of perceiving or looking at both the inner and outer worlds ». Once more he stresses the absolute necessity of simply taking time out from routine existence in order to look more honestly at all « our worlds ».

view of ordinary events or reality may be either distorted consciously or might not even be a part of that person's consciousness at all. Daily occurrences become routine. Therefore, they are unnoticed by the ordinary person. This person is very much like another type who would approach everything from a purely intellectual point of view. By so doing, much is missed. Oftentimes the more formative characteristics of any event or person (v.g. the emotions, the details) are not seen. Also, it must be remembered that such an intellectual approach lacks the love element which most often radically changes the perception of any particular person or event. So it is that such « single-minded » visions of the world do not give much space for, as Kelsey puts it, God to break through. That basic pedagogy of God which has been to speak in events, in persons throughout the ages is frustrated simply by the lack of awareness of the ordinary. This perspective of God speaking in the world, in reality, is the necessary background against which meditation should be seen according to Kelsey. For here we see « ...the purpose of meditating must be understood in terms of God's interest in this world and His desire to have us become free to relate to Him » (p. 140). Meditation then is important for it is the means whereby we can be removed from all that keeps the human person blinded to God's presence. Through meditation, the person is free to encounter the self, the world, and primarily the Other.

Meditation, which Kelsey maintains is encounter, will also have as its purpose to provide us with an all important ingredient of any experience of encounter:

« The ultimate goal of meditation is love: between the person and God » (p. 139)⁸.

The activity he is discussing at this point is meant to give some sort of knowledge-experience which will kindle that love element in the human person who is involved. « One of the main purposes of meditation is to expose us to the reality of the Father in such a way that we can become the kind of people who are able to love » (p. 65). Through the practice of meditation a new world is opened to the person. New dimensions of reality are perceived. In fact reality itself is perceived for perhaps the first time in its totality. In seeing anew through meditation the human person is automatically enthralled by the reality now seen in a more complete fashion. That reality of course is the Father. Now seeing Him in greater depth, the Christian

⁸ Cf. also p. 16: « In reality meditation is the record of one's love life with God ».

is drawn to Him, is attracted and is therefore loving. This idea of Kelsey reminds one of Jesus' words in the Gospel: « No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me... » (Jn. 6: 44)⁹.

A CRITIQUE

While Kelsey's approach has some very fine points to make as we have already seen, there are some areas of his theories which need to be examined more carefully. We have already seen Kelsey speak very often of « an inner and an outer world » and these references should lead us to wonder about a type of dualism which might be at the foundation of his thought process concerning meditation. Is it really there? If so does it do harm to his ideas on meditation? In his view of meditation as encounter and its practice meditation is definitely an experience, but is something to be sought out *as experience*? These are some of the questions which will have to remain with us as we look at Kelsey in a bit more detail now. Moreover we will also have to examine other elements which he presents such as spiritual poverty and silence to see whether or not Kelsey's view of meditation is as complete as it might be. Let us begin by looking at these areas to determine more clearly Kelsey's contribution to the study of meditation as experience.

Dualism

We cannot help but be struck by the basic thread with which Kelsey weaves his work on meditation. The very title of chapter four is most striking in this regard and causes the reader to wonder: « The Spiritual World as the Soul's Soil ». This title could mean that the soul of the person has its roots in the non-physical world. To understand what he means we must let him explain:

« Some comprehension of the reality of the spiritual world, as separate from, but related to, the physical world, is crucial to this view of meditation. If there is no such realm, meditation at

⁹ This notion of being drawn by the Father through Christ has some very striking roots in early Christianity which could be studied in the light of revelation and meditation. Cf. Richard P. Hardy: *Actualité de la Révélation divine. Une étude des 'Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium' de saint Augustin*. Paris: Beauchesne, 1974, p. 137-166.

best is only talking to oneself, and at worst it verges on stupidity and illusion or outright madness. It is difficult to open materialistic Western people's eyes to the reality of the spiritual world. There is no way to find this reality except by trying something which they have been taught leads nowhere. This is one of the reasons why it so often requires desperation to get secular persons to try opening themselves to this reality which is new to them » (p. 33)¹⁰.

There seems to be no equivocation possible. What we are dealing with here is a world view which involves two completely separate, distinct worlds. Without an understanding, or at least an acknowledgement of the « spiritual world », meditation actually is impossible. Meditation, since it is done in view of and concentrated mainly upon this spirit world, loses its *raison-d'être* if one does not accept the existence of the spiritual world. So it must be remembered that there are two distinct worlds in Kelsey's affirmations. He wishes to underline this fact in the very beginning of his work and so, in speaking of meditation he says:

« It is the process of opening ourselves to the realm of non-physical reality in which God can touch us far more directly than in the physical world » (p. 8)¹¹.

Thus, God seems to be stymied by the presence of the physical world which HE HIMSELF CREATED AS GOOD. He can still touch the human being, but what is implied is that it is rather a tedious, convoluted process. Rather than God coming to humanity, (despite what Kelsey has said just before this on p. 8) the reverse is much more suitable in his eyes. Everything should be geared to God's world, which of course is purely spiritual. It is this « other world » of His which counts. The basic reason for this, according to Kelsey is that because when we die we leave « this world » and enter into the « other », and the person must be prepared (p. 42-43). In recognizing and coming to grips with that world now, as one lives in this physical world, one is really very wise in his view. Furthermore, for Kelsey, the existence of these two worlds is something Jesus Himself believed in

¹⁰ Cf. also p. 61: « Through meditation we can locate this precious vein [meeting God in love] buried deep within us and begin to open passage ways of belief in this kind of God and the experiences He makes possible. Meditation is one way that brings us to this power and helps us stay open to it so that we can become what we are capable of being ».

¹¹ The whole book is filled with similar dualistic views of humanity, God and the world.: vg. 34-35; 38; 42-43; 52; 70; 97; 99; 145; 146; 168.

and was quite explicit about. « There can be little question about the way Jesus of Nazareth believed. He expressed quite clearly His understanding that we are in contact with two different worlds. This is seen in one after another of the parables where He often used some description of the physical world to illustrate what he was revealing about another realm of reality. It is seen in His various references to the angelic realm and in His teachings about the evil one, as well as in His understanding and healing of the one possessed by the demon, and also in His own experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. While Jesus certainly showed a thorough appreciation of the outer material world in all that He said and did, He also wanted men to know their relation to the world of spirit. This is assumed in all His teachings about prayer which make sense only within such a framework » (p. 35). Here is where we see one of the main difficulties with Kelsey. There is no doubt that what he says about Jesus is true — If we approach scripture with a solidly literal interpretation. However, despite his saying that « Jesus showed a thorough appreciation of the outer material world... », Kelsey seems to have failed to see the oneness of the physical-spiritual reality which Jesus shows by the Incarnation in which Jesus says THIS world is good and to be valued. For Jesus, His very becoming flesh says that it is in THIS world that God has revealed and continues to reveal Himself. The whole of the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus consecrates THIS world in a wholistic view. The resurrection of Jesus consecrates THIS world in a wholistic view. The resurrection such as Jesus experienced has no meaning if the world is simply a hindrance to true existence. If the world is to be left behind totally, the message of Christ as saviour of the world has faint echoes in the world of the real. In Jesus there is simply no dualism. He spoke in the language of His time. There is the reality of the spirit. This is true. However, that that reality comes to humanity and shows the total picture not outside, but within it.

The reality of Jesus the Christ is that of one sent to make the human person whole — body-soul. He is not one whom the Father has sent simply to save the soul of the human person. He came and comes to save the total person. This is accomplished NOT by taking that person out of this world, but rather by showing that person the Father IN this world and the way to the Father in this world. In fact, for Jesus the world is one. There is one life. For the believer this one life which is Eternal life (and which Kelsey would see as something beginning after physical death) begins here and now. (Jn. 6: 47) The believer, in fact, is not one who lives for another world. He lives now this life of Jesus which is forever. Kelsey's dualism in reality does not allow for this all important feature of the teaching

of Jesus. Because of his rather radical dualism Kelsey has laid a foundation which in fact does serious harm to the value and the reality of the Incarnation and Resurrection of the Son of God, despite some attempts to prop them up¹².

There is no doubt that Kelsey senses a certain difficulty with maintaining the value of the world along with his dualistic approach. In a few places, he attempts to affirm the world. For example, he says: « This idea of love between human beings and God is based on the understanding that God is so deeply interested in the real physical world that He became incarnate in it, and that He is so deeply concerned about real human beings that He died for them » (p. 139). Kelsey, no doubt, holds that God « ...makes His power-which we discover in psychoid reality-available to us in the physical world » (p. 139). This is, for him, the basis for sacraments which « ...keep us in touch with the historical reality of Christianity, the way God entered into the world in Christ and also with the importance of our physical nature both in itself and in giving God ways of continuing to break through into the outer, physical world » (p. 195). He follows this up with an even more astounding statement: « The sacraments make us realize how important the simplest, most physical acts can be as ways of allowing God to reveal Himself to us » (p. 195). These are strong words with which we would all agree. However, within the context of his « this world-that world » dichotomy which is even more evident and stronger, these statements of his lose some of their power. Within that dualistic framework, the more positive statements by Kelsey can only be understood in terms of means to an end. Affirmations of the world, as we have noted, presented by Kelsey simply see the world and sacraments for example as positive things which enable a person to leave it for the other world. It seems that in Kelsey, sacraments and other « worldly-spiritual » realities are valid in as much as they enable the spirit self to be zeroed in on God alone. However, does this not really deny the full validity of the sacramental life? Sacraments and the world are in fact realities meant to truly enhance the lives of human beings. Our lives are here and now, body-soul existences, in this world where God is now. Thus, they should not be seen (nor should the world be seen) as springboards to another world. Rather they must be seen as enabling us to look and see the total reality of the world in which we live.

Kelsey's view, despite what he might say in a few places which we have noted above, in fact, rejects a revelatory process which is historical and therefore incarnational, rooted in life.

¹² Cf. p. 139; 99; 195.

It could very well be that the problem is to be found in Kelsey's view of meditation which is based upon a spirituality which is individualistic and other worldly. It is that which is typical of the spirituality which Matthew Fox calls that of Yesterday¹³. It leads to a sense of detachment which is purely and simply a means of destroying and « getting out of this world »¹⁴. It is the opposite of a spirituality of compassion which brings together love of God and love of neighbor¹⁵. It denies life its proper and Christian values. The thrust of contemporary spirituality (which in fact is founded upon centuries of Christian practice) requires as McNamara says: « an irrepressible zest for life, with an overruling, specific, personal, and passionate objective »¹⁶. The human person is meant to meditate in order to see life and reality as it is, thus destroying illusions which must try to maintain a totally separate, other, spiritual world. Once a person sees life more clearly, the person can then and in that very process learn to hear and see the revealing God who is within it and Who is opening Himself to humanity in it. Kelsey's approach seems to be quite different. His meditation view would really have us forget

¹³ Matthew Fox: *On Becoming a Musical Mystical Bear. Spirituality American Style*. New York: Paulist Press, 1976, p. xviii-xx.

¹⁴ There are two things we need to note concerning his idea of detachment: 1) Kelsey attempts to show how excessive detachment can lead to a serious destructive vision of the world (p. 99) and 2) he tries to demonstrate that the world has its value, that we are meant to love others and God in a whole life dimension, (p. 98). Yet these attempts to salvage a proper Christian view are totally vitiated by his dualism which we have already underlined. In fact, his very attempt to save something of the perennial Christian teaching of the goodness of the world is but his admission that his basic theory is wrong and he must admit contradictions if he is to maintain it. Furthermore, in the same line of thought, Kelsey refers several times to John of the Cross as one who « ...hardly took the physical body, its values and its needs seriously » (p. 34). Though he says that John warns against exaggerated asceticism (p. 99). Kelsey fails to see that for John detachment is sought in order that one may ultimately live IN THIS WORLD, fully, freely and lovingly with God. Kelsey has failed to understand John of the Cross in my opinion. For John, the world is a symphony of divine music (*Cant-B XIV-XV. 25*). p. 671. In fact the whole of the commentary on stanzas XIV and XV is filled with a true praise for the world. Moreover, one need only read and understand his poem, *De la creación 3 & 4* (p. 934-936) to see now he views the world as the only worthy bride of the Son of God. (The references are from *Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz*. (Crisógono de Jesús, notes and texts by Mathias del Niño Jesús and Lucinio del SS. Sacramento. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1954, (5th ed.).

I would also refer the reader for the point of detachment in John of the Cross to: Richard P. Hardy: « Solitude: A Sanjuanist Perspective, » in *Eglise et Théologie*, 6 (1975) p. 5-23; and « *Silencio Divino: A Sanjuanist Study* ». in *Eglise et Théologie*, 7 (1976), p. 219-233.

¹⁵ Matthew Fox: *A Spirituality Named Compassion and The Healing of the Global Village. Humpty Dumpty and Us*. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1979, p. 31.

¹⁶ William McNamara: *Mystical Passion. Spirituality for A Bored Society*. New York: Paulist Press. 1977, p. 6.

this world with the result that we melt rather unrealistically into his spiritual world.

To conclude this section on dualism in Kelsey's thought, it might be useful to quote a rather lengthy passage where Kelsey reveals a great deal. He is speaking of a position which would hold that the only sources of valid experiences are the physical and he says:

« According to this point of view, one may see value in certain external events, and by reasoning may infer that God might be there in these events. But with no way of knowing any nonphysical reality, such speculation remains speculation and gives little confidence. Any idea of a direct experience of God, such as a vision that might come from the God source, is absurd. Since there is no basis for such experiences, they must be considered hallucinations or perhaps signs of mental breakdown. It is difficult in this framework to make much sense of meditation as an effort to find religious experiences » (p. 146).

First of all, we must note that Kelsey makes no mention of faith, which in fact is the power which enables the human person to see and hear God in history. Secondly, this whole section (as does his theory of meditation) seems to deny the fact that God respects our human nature and speaks to persons as human — not as souls enslaved in some evil, material body and world. The process of God's relationship to humanity takes place within the sphere of the human, spatial and temporal condition. The normal, natural way for knowledge is sense knowledge. The miraculous is NOT the norm and this by its very definition. God created the human person in a particular way. He respects and loves that totality. For this reason, He set about to reveal Himself in who we are and in where we are, not outside of the human situation. So it is that everything speaks the reality of God for those who have the Faith to hear. The Incarnation of the Son of God is the revelatory meeting of God and humanity. It speaks God in unique and fulfilling fashion precisely because the Incarnation enters the pattern of God coming to humanity and of humanity coming to know Him in all that is¹⁷. What we have said does not eliminate a knowledge of God which is beyond intellectual, sense knowledge. Far from it. The insight, the mystical knowledge of a St. Bernard, of the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, of a St. John of the Cross is valid. Even more, we must remember that such knowledge is the result of grace *perfecting nature*, not destroying or suspending it. So, in affirming this « natural » graced

¹⁷ Cf. the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), particularly paragraph 4.

way of knowing, we affirm what has been the constant belief of Christianity.

In augustinian terminology, for example¹⁸, Christ healed the human person to see Him through His incarnation and the inner gift of Faith. The two (Faith and Incarnation) come together, not to destroy the human condition but to perfect it to the reality it was always meant to be. To see God, the human person must see the world. There, that person discovers the Son of God made man, precisely so that the world might be seen in its fulness. Therefore, any meditation theory which does not include, enhance and make the world progress is false. Any theory which would not make the world the focus of our awareness is an illusory one.

In the quotation we have made below, we see that Kelsey is implying that only a direct experience of God (i.e. a vision) is the only real communication which is possible between God and the human community. What we must remember is that for Kelsey what is meant is an actual vision. He is not speaking of a graced insight or true mystical knowledge which is an overall experience involving much more than just the intellect. The vision of which he speaks are those which might be typified in the Fatima experience or other like phenomena — perhaps including even less dramatic ones. The whole of our tradition in Christianity looks at the knowledge of God involved here as a type, but certainly it is more concerned with a knowledge which is consistent with grace and nature rather than an « extraordinary » event. However, within a dualistic view such as Kelsey maintains, the idea of vision, of the unusual is not only common but essential. The world is evil and has, at the very least, so much corrupting possibilities that only very direct, God-originated visions can be true vehicles of communication and communion. Again this is totally contrary to the revelatory tradition of Christianity.

Furthermore, the quotation tells us that « It is difficult in this framework to make much sense of meditation as an effort to find religious experience ». And this too is true. If meditation is purely and simply a technique to obtain religious experiences which are spiritual (even if sensual at times according to Kelsey, p. 125-162), then Kelsey is correct. However, it would seem that for him visions and other such religious experiences are really the CORE of religion and meditation. Now, let us note that there is no doubt that religious experience is present in any believer's life. These experiences are not only good but in many instances are the means of insight and conver-

¹⁸ Cf. Richard P. Hardy: « The Incarnation and Revelation in Augustine's 'Tractatus in Iohannis Euangelium' », in *Eglise et Théologie*, 3 (1972). p. 193-220.

sion. (Here we take religious experience to mean any real conscious communication between a person and God). However, the problem is not the experience as such, so much as it is with the human person's view of the experience.

Classical authors such as John of the Cross (1542-1591) have insisted time and again that experience for its own sake must never be the purpose of one's prayer life¹⁹. The key element is faith. The person should beware of various apprehensions and seek God alone²⁰. That there are experiences lived in one's religious life is evident and part of this process. Meditation itself will at times be the occasion of or perhaps even the cause of some of these experiences. This is well and good. However, contrary to what Kelsey proposes, meditation should not be seen primarily as a process which is meant to create an experience. Experience seeking misplaces the focus of meditation: it seeks the experience rather than God who is found only if the experience does not overwhelm the God who comes in that experience.

Meditation is meant to open the human person to who that person is, to what the world is in relationship to the human person and to God who has come in all of this. The more the person meditates the more that person sees God in the world and not a God outside of it as if He could be seen without real relationship to it. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, God has been known, loved and lived in a constant relationship with the world. This has been accomplished only in and through the world: its symbols and imagination as well as all else that makes up the world. These are realities which are meant to open us to the world. Neither imagination nor anything else is meant to be used to escape from it. However, in Kelsey's idea of meditation, there seems to be an element which would take one out of this world and into the other. In fact, he has said so explicitly in the various places where he speaks of two worlds, as we have seen already (p. 150, 146, 42-43). Dualism, this world and that world is very much a part of Kelsey's meditation theory and for that reason alone one would do well to be very cautious in accepting his theory. However, other elements are to be found which must be considered now.

¹⁹ For John of the Cross, religious experience is something that the person should not seek first and foremost. And even when the experience, the feeling occurs, the person should not spend one's whole time dwelling upon it, much less seek it out. (Cf. *Subida del Monte Carmelo*, II, 17, 9, p. 434). In fact, the whole of the *Subida* is devoted to the process of finding God without just seeking for the experience of Him.

²⁰ *Subida* II, 11, 2-6, p. 413-414.

The Need for God

In a very interesting chapter, Kelsey speaks of experiencing the human person's need for God. With the remarkable title: « Cracking the Husk: Man's Need for God ». Kelsey opens his discussion of how important it is to become aware of God. He says: « If we are like seeds in the way we have suggested, do we need to have the husks of our souls cracked open so that we can sink roots in the spiritual world and find direct contact with God? » (p. 42)²¹. His question is answered affirmatively as he proceeds to speak of how death, illness and the consciousness of the person's own helplessness in the face of a variety of problems cause one to turn to God. This, without a doubt, is true. Many do in fact turn to God when they need Him. This is to say, when all else fails the person believes that it is time to direct his/her attention to the last resort: God. In this way, Kelsey underlines how spiritual poverty and/or a tragic situation in one's life can open the human person to prayer and meditation. However, this view of the negative elements in life which can open the human person to God could be much richer than it is as expressed by Kelsey.

First of all, we must remember how such a view stems from a rather mechanistic view of God. For here, rather than being seen as one who is in constant loving relationship to the human person, God is seen as the great overseer. God is the one who gives, after all else has failed. All that which is natural, normal and physical finally cedes its place to a God who seems to have been playing games with humanity. God has been somewhat like the big cat playing with a little mouse, pushing it hither and thither to watch its reaction. God is seen as one « out of this world ». He is the miracle worker who seems to pop in and out of this life fulfilling the desires of the human person. This view of God which is the background for this chapter is unacceptable. God is neither a giant « goodies machine » nor a superman. The Father of humanity has been revealed in Jesus as the all compassionate one who is always with humanity in its struggle to live and to grow more humanly. In revealing His Son, He showed humanity that the vicious cycle of death and suffering can be broken through love and true compassion for all. This God does not come through to the consciousness

²¹ It is important to note here once again Kelsey's dualism, for it forms the foundation of this whole chapter. He accents the same thing when he says: « Once a person realizes that there is a spiritual or psychoid world as well as a physical one. that person learns that there are forces of evil more destructive than the simply human ones, and that these spiritual forces of evil are those that the individual cannot deal with on one's own », (p. 52).

of the reader of Kelsey's book and this, because such a view is not there. Moreover, it is more than just a false view of God that renders this chapter strange.

We have also his view of evil which strikes the reader. For Kelsey sees evil as causing us to turn to God, but his presentation is such that it fails to present the real values inherent in negative experiences. For the believer, such experiences contain some most important points. Let us look simply at what we might call the experience of the tragic, a tragedy. Tragedy is that which destroys a segment of life which is very dear to the human person. It may be, for example, a sudden death of a beloved father or that of a child who is adored. It may be the tearing apart of a nation by war, violence or the total destruction of human rights. It may be the existence of a battered wife or child. It may be utter poverty, practically unheard of in our north american midst. Whatever the concrete reality is, it tears apart our values and as such it is a tragedy. It forces the person to re-think his or her existence and even, his or her relationship with this so-called God of goodness and justice. Tragedy opens the person to see what is: the real. As such, it « forces » the human person to pray, to meditate — not to ask for something so much as to become something, someone who lives life as it is and grows in it. Meditation and prayer — even if that prayer be of intercession — actually is meant and is used to help the person see what is real and true and then to live in it. Kelsey's view seems rather distant from this perspective of prayer and meditation. For him, the experience of suffering or the negative or the tragic simply makes us realise that the human person simply cannot face it on his or her own. God's assistance is needed. Therefore, the person turns to God. Kelsey fails to investigate the deeper meaning of the tragic for one's spiritual growth. Consequently, he fails to examine yet another element which indeed contributes to growth and the whole meditative process: that is, the experience of dread.

Closely connected with the tragic is the experience of dread. F. David Martin puts it this way:

« The vision of the dreadful differs from the tragic to the degree that it sees only meaninglessness, a void of value. Why are there things at all? The very givenness of things is sensed as contingent and aimless. Whereas the tragic experience always invokes the fear of, or suffering related to, a specific something, the experience of the dreadful reduces us to such total insignificance that existence appears valueless »²².

²² F. David Martin: *Art and The Religious Experience: The 'Language' of the Sacred*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1972, p. 55.

To see life, particularly one's own, as meaningless, worthless and nothing. This is dread. Thomas Merton puts the same reality in more religious terms saying of the dreadful experience: « At the same time, he seems to lose the conviction that God is or can be a refuge for him. It is as if God himself were hostile and implacable or worse still, as if God himself had become emptiness and as if all were emptiness, nothingness, dread and night »²³. These two quotations we have just made are modern descriptions of Juan de la Cruz' classical « night of the soul »²⁴. In other words, dread is the time of seeing oneself as one is — with all the risks of non-being. As one experiences it, it is part of reality. There is no comfort in any sense for the individual who experiences it. All is dead. All is dry. Such a powerful experience cannot but have an effect upon one's prayer life.

Yet, that effect should not be viewed in a simplistic way. Tragedy and dread do not simply push us to ask God for help. God, by this time, has become too awesomely horrible for that. « In the substance of his soul he suffers abandonment, supreme poverty, dryness, cold and sometimes heat. He finds relief in nothing, nor is there a thought that consoles him, nor can he even raise his heart to God, so oppressed is he by this flame »²⁵. So says Fray Juan de la Cruz. However, Kelsey would maintain that the experience of the tragic and dread would turn the person Godward. This is true, but the consciousness of that fact is not there. In fact, the consciousness senses nothing but the opposite of a turning Godward. Not only is Kelsey's view contrary to the proven classical teaching and authors of Christianity, but it is contrary even to the most common experience of any mature believer. For contrary to Kelsey's point of view, the role of the tragic is to force the human person to see reality and remain involved in it. Thus does a person discover not just the self, but God who is there even in the darkness. In other words, all negative experiences are not meant to bring the human person directly to the other world. They are something other than that. They do indeed break open the « husks » of the human person, but they do this so that the person may see and live in THIS world

²³ Thomas Merton: *Contemplative Prayer*. New York Doubleday Image Books, 1971, p. 98.

²⁴ Juan de la Cruz: *Llama-B I*, 18-20, p. 837-839.

²⁵ Juan de la Cruz: *Llama-B I*, 20: « ...y en la substancia del alma padece profunda pobreza y desamparo, seca y fria y a veces caliente, no hallando en nada alivio, ni un pensamiento que la consuele, ni poder levantar el corazón a Dios, habiéndosele puesto esta llama tan esquivamente... » (p. 839). The English translation is from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodríguez, Washington D.C.: ICS publications, 1979, p. 587.

which is the one world where God meets the human person. Meditation will ultimately become the living out of this whole reality in a deepening, conscious relationship with God revealed in Jesus the Christ.

Conclusion

Kelsey has presented a theory of meditation which brings out some interesting points; not to say some important ones. Meditation is seen as an encounter in growing love with the Father, through Jesus. It is a technique which enables a person to contact God. There is no doubt that Kelsey notes the key elements: negative experiences and their relationship to meditation, silence, and solitude, use of imagination and techniques. However, all this is based upon a dualistic view of life and the world which destroys all viability of his meditation perspective within Christianity. Kelsey has so divided this world and that world that the only route left open to him is a strongly « spiritualistic » one despite all that he might say. In the process, it would seem that Kelsey has lost sight of the real values of meditation in the Christian tradition. Those real values are to be found in the rootedness of the individual in this world in order to be able to live out the incarnation and resurrection which are the core of the Christian life. Within the Christian concept of meditation, meditation must be seen as that prayer exercise which gives the human person to see through Faith the depth of God's coming to this world and the human community. The kingdom of God being established now, resurrection and eternal life beginning now are Christian realities that a proper view of meditation will highlight.

Meditation for the Christian is an exercise of prayer which grounds one. It is now and has always been the process whereby the Christian becomes conscious of Jesus the Christ in the human person's life as it is. It has always meant an acknowledgement, a seeing of one's self, life and the world in relationship to the God who has created and who continuously comes and reveals Himself in this world, this life. At the root of any validly Christian perspective of meditation must be the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ whose life has shown the believer the power of THIS world to speak the God who is in constant relationship to it. The practice of meditation then will enable the believer to verify, and to live life here and now in relationship to the living God.

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