RADICAL OPTIMISM

Practical Spirituality in an Uncertain World

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Preface to the Second Edition

The more troubled and difficult the world becomes, the more important it becomes to be optimistic. And the more deeply we need to root our optimism. When we cannot reasonably base it on the way things are going, we know that we have to base it in the ultimate reality of God. We know that it has to be radical.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said that we will not make the effort that is necessary to move us to the next stage of evolution, to form the world of the noosphere, the hyperpersonal, the world of global peace and friendship and prosperity, unless we believe it has a very good chance of succeeding. We need to be *optimistic.* Visions of utopias have a place in our thoughts and in our efforts because they activate the ideas and the desires that move us in those directions. In our personal lives and concerns, optimism makes a big difference, measurably improving our health and career success.

Mattie J.T. Stepanek, author of *Journey through Heartsongs,* says that "positive attitudes" impel us "towards the journey for world peace. And world peace, harmony, and confidence are essential for our future" [Poem 13]. Without confidence we may not have a future. And anyway, without confidence, who has the heart to go forward in living and to enjoy living? Confidence, optimism, is fundamentally

necessary to true pleasure and happiness, to improvements, and to life itself.

This book is about a way of obtaining this radical optimism by means of contemplation. Contemplation means withdrawing attention from outward, objective, particular, and temporal concerns, and refocusing on inward, subjective, general and even eternal realities. This transcendent standpoint brings us into a deeper place with surer values and a more authentic selfhood. From this place we are also better able to deal with the temporal and particular. Essential to both the inward movement and the outward movement is an orientation we may call "purity of heart." Contemplation is not just an intellectual activity. It is also a moral and a devotional matter. Unless we have freed ourselves of violence, anger, vengefulness and vindictiveness, we will not be able to retire within. Unless we have detached from lust, greed, envy, and covetousness, we will not be able to refocus on the transcendent level. Unless we are energized by yearning for the divine as the Real and are willing to be embedded in it rather than making use of it, we will never find it.

People who are long-term practitioners of contemplation characteristically drop one local self-identification after another. They no longer see their personal reality limited to membership in this group rather than that. The whole truth about them is not summed up by a recital of what sex, race, nation, religion, social stratum they belong to. They experience themselves as being more real at a level that transcends all these classifications, and they simultaneously see other people at the same level of commonality. This view inevitably makes for peaceful and supportive relationships.

It is in this sense that contemplation necessarily involves metaphysics. Metaphysics is not an item in a New Age agenda but a branch of philosophy that studies what all beings have in common. It is the most general science. This is why the contemplative, after learning to quiet the mind sufficiently

to withdraw it from the concerns of everyday particularity, focuses on the most far-reaching questions: the relation of the finite to the infinite, of the contingent to the necessary, of the temporal to the eternal. And, of these pairs themselves, we ask whether they are ineluctably polarized with respect to one another or whether they can be united in some way.

This metaphysical exploration is carried on in this book by means of familiar religious metaphors that invite the practicing contemplative to enter into a subjective perspective in which something universal can be seen. For instance, the meditation on "the heart of Jesus" is an exercise to help the meditator center into the core of Being, where both the infinite (divinity) and the finite (humanity) can be found in mutual indwelling. This kind of practice is proposed because the crucial transition in the contemplative process is not so much in what is seen as in the position from which it is seen. The subjective sense of existing shifts its "location" from a particular intersection of finite and contingent classes to the transcendent level of the infinite, necessary, and eternal. This is why the book concludes with the contemplation of "the communion of the saints," a deep awareness of the absolute universality of kinship among all those that are.

Contemplation thus both has a value in its own right, gaining insight into the nature of reality at its ultimate depth, and is fundamentally useful in dealing with our worldly problems. When we reach an impasse with some entity we are obliged to interact with, the only thing to do is back off and achieve a new perspective from a level transcendent to the problem level. When you do not identify with either of the adversaries, you can often see what assumptions are being made by each party—and sometimes by both. A situation of impasse is usually an indication that something is amiss with the assumptions. The contemplative practice can bring to consciousness what we have been taking for granted unconsciously. Once these assumptions have been exposed, they

can be studied and reevaluated. Then a new effort can be made at resolving the problem. This can be a breakthrough experience for populations moving out of a worldview in which they believed themselves necessarily subject to some elite (based on assumptions about sex, race, wealth, religion, etc.). It is called for in all multi-cultural situations. It is relevant to any apparent "clash of civilizations." It is worth trying even in apparently irreconcilable quarrels over admittedly limited resources (such as the same piece of territory). When we seek the common ground, the more basic humanly shared values, we at least put ourselves in a more creative position for finding new approaches.

The present crisis, which is partly about culture and partly about economic control, needs to be seen in this context. There are "terrorists" abroad in the world, with dreadful weapons within their reach, and there is a System in place in the world which—almost unnoticed—has gained control over most of the fundamentals of life: food, jobs, welfare security, health and safety measures, protection (or not) of the environment, and information about what is going on. We need, urgently, to consider all over again, what is our life about, what values are important, which items serve others. Are human beings to serve economic growth, to the disruption of their livelihoods, their families, their right to know what they are eating and what events, significant to their lives, are taking place and who is making the decisions affecting them; or is the economy in service to human life, its well-being and happiness?

We need to find our way back to the very basic realities, truths, values. Contemplation is the road by which we may do this. We need to find the roots of our being: we need to be radical. And we need to do so in hope, even strong hope, for our condition is perilous. We will not have the will and the energy and the earnestness and the perseverance and the courage to engage the present crisis unless we believe that we

can preserve our lives and our values. We need to believe that we can come into an arrangement whereby persons can manage freely to have voice in the conditions of their own lives. And that they can do it without infringing the parallel rights of other persons. We must want the well-being of all and of each in that all. Seeing such a vision and believing that it can be attained and committing ourselves to working toward it is what I mean by optimism — optimism that is rooted in deep reality and working out in love by skillful means.

Beatrice Bruteau
August 24, 2002

Preface

When we first started the Schola Contemplationis, I didn't know what the word *schola* really meant. I thought of it only as a school. We were forming a correspondence network for contemplatives—mostly laypeople, some religious; mostly Christians, but not all—who wanted to be in touch with others like themselves, to share their insights, to be reassured about their experiences, to feel the fellowship. We also had the idea that those who knew a little more about the contemplative life could teach those who were just entering upon it, and that the old hands could all teach one another. The Schola was to be a mutual, or cooperative, school in that sense.

But the Latin word *schola* comes from the Greek *scholē* which means "leisure." What an interesting discovery! Before you can teach, you must learn, and in order to learn, you must stop your busyness and hold still for a while. You must give yourself leisure to learn.

I saw then that there can be a sequence in the derived meanings of *schola,* and this book addressed to contemplatives reflects that sequence. First comes the leisure itself, the cessation of restless activity, the stillness and the silence. Then comes the learning, the instructive part, framing ideas that can help—"school" in our usual sense. Finally, we can have a "school" in the sense of a "school of thought," a

community of shared insight, a body for concerted expression of the shared vision.

The vision I am trying to share has been called by a number of people "optimistic." Some of them are pleased on this account, some of them are not. The latter ask for more recognition of the pain with which life is filled, for acknowledgement of the difficulties of living a spiritual life, and for faith in the redemptive power of suffering. The former seem to get a lift from the "upbeat" attitude, find it new and refreshing, bringing to the front of the stage something that had been hovering in the wings, or perhaps present all the while unnoticed, painted on the backdrop.

My own notion about this is that of course we all know that life can show us an aspect of misery and malevolence and sorrow and horror. And because of this, it also can present us with doubt and perplexity and apparent absurdity, which is even worse. We feel that we could bear with the misery if we could just see some meaning. I am trying to contribute to the quest for meaning and the consequent alleviation of the misery. And I do not think that that can be done by constantly dwelling on how sinful or sorrowful or hard life is. Even when true, that isn't helpful. And I do not believe that it is the deepest truth.

The deepest truth is our union with the Absolute, Infinite Being, with God. That's the root of our reality. And it is from that root that my optimism is derived. That is why I decided to call it "radical optimism." The way to meaning is the path of perspective. We have to find the right angle from which to view our situation. I want to look at it from the root out into the branches, so to speak. It seems to me that situating ourselves somewhere on the periphery, amongst the twisting twigs and the fluttering leaves, gives us an inaccurate slant on things. It makes us identify with what I have called our "descriptions." But shift our sense of identity to the root, to our "real self," to the source of our being in God, and all looks very different.

Our model for this is Jesus, who could face torture and abandonment and still say, "Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16: 32–33). That's radical optimism. It's rooted in the Source of Being: "The Father is with me." Or, equally, "I am in the Father," "I am in the Source of Being." That is the point of view that "overcomes" the "tribulation" of "the world." And therefore we should "be of good cheer."

That is the deep truth of the matter, in my view. But this radical optimism is also practical. When the local realists tried to make Jesus acknowledge that Jairus's daughter was dead, he refused to listen, and told her father, "Do not fear, only believe" (Mark 5:36). How much more optimistic can you get than to believe that someone is not really dead when she has all the signs of being dead, and to believe that you can restore her to life and health? But that *believing,* that optimism, is the first and ineluctable step toward actually demonstrating what is held in the belief (Mark 11:23–24). If you say to yourself, this is hard to do, human nature is weak, we can't be expected to be like that, then you will have the same experience that Peter had when he tried to walk on the water. Being optimistic, he succeeded; but as soon as he began to doubt, to notice the difficulty, to think that maybe it couldn't be done, he began to sink. Jesus did not commend him for recognizing the outrageousness of his attempt, but scolded him for not holding on to his belief that he could do it (Matthew 14:28–31). Filling your mind, your imagination, your emotions, with the belief that you *can* do the good that you intend is the most powerful help you can bring to bear on actual accomplishment.

I believe this radical optimism is the good news of the gospel and I propose that we take it seriously. In this book I am proposing that we take it seriously with respect to the development of the contemplative life. Not that it is explicitly

spoken of to any great extent. But this faith and mood clearly underlie and inform the whole approach. Spiritual practices on the contemplative path involve a certain amount of discipline and overturning of old habits, a willingness to shift viewpoints and accept different attitudes, the courage to think for oneself, to ask deeply probing questions and perhaps try unauthorized opinions, the perseverance to continue when success is not yet visible, and the heart to undertake one's contribution toward creatively "dancing the world."[1] There is a natural temptation to feel that all this, if not quite beyond our powers, is certainly very arduous and apt to lead to considerable discomfort and unpleasantness. So we tend to back off from the enterprise, or continuously to excuse ourselves because of the difficulty of the task. The virtue of radical optimism in this context is that it encourages us in the undertaking, sustains us in our efforts, reassures us that we can do it. It turns our thoughts and feelings in a positive direction, not letting them sink down in admissions of failure.

Optimism, like pessimism, tends to be a self-justifying outlook. The more pessimistic you are, the more you are likely to fail and thus justify your pessimism. And similarly, the more optimistic you are, the more apt you are to succeed and justify your optimism. However, my optimism is not merely pragmatic. I also believe that it is ultimately, metaphysically, true because of its being *radical* optimism, coming from the root of our being, securely held in the Absolute Being.

I have tried to explain how I see us rooted in the Absolute and expressing the Absolute in the world. That is the core of the contemplative life, so far as I can see at present. The heart of it is insight, or what I often call "realization." The preparation for this is the exercises of relaxation and faculty-training, and the sequents from it are what I have called "manifestation"—a kind of spontaneous overflow of goodness-filled being so powerful that it creates the world.

The realization rises up out of a mystical "leisure," when the world stops claiming your full attention for a moment out of time, for a divine sabbath. It gives you a seed that grows and branches and develops various sorts of "instruction." To the extent that the realization rings the truth-bell in other breasts, it forms a common ground, a dancing ground on which a community can, with delightful diversity, weave a collaborative pattern. So it may be said to be a "contemplative school," a Schola Contemplationis.

THREE

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Meditation

"You shall love the Lord your God with
your whole heart, your whole soul,
your whole mind, and with all your strength."
Mark 12:29

This is the first and greatest commandment. It is what the contemplative is trying to do: to come to this kind of wholeness, totality, integrality, and energy. The entire heart is to be involved, the entire soul, the entire mind. Each of these is to be so integrated within itself that it acts as one. And each of them is to be directed to one sole focal point, so that they will be integrated with one another. And all this is to be done with a total commitment of our energy, with great vigor and ardor. According to Jesus, engaging in this kind of love toward God is the greatest thing we can do. It is the fundamental thing, the necessary thing, the first thing and the ultimate thing.

What was said above about stillness is part of this process of integration, of becoming whole, so that we can love God with a whole heart, a whole soul, and a whole mind. I spoke of stillness and pacification of the body through relaxation, hygiene, and silence, through stillness of the desires of the senses and of the personality. It is important to see that it is precisely this letting go—this *relaxation*—of misplaced ten-

sions and stresses in our life that also releases the energy, the *vigor,* with which we may devote ourselves to concentrated, full expression of our love of God.

Spiritual trainers in more than one tradition have likened spiritual life to athletic or artistic performance. The likeness lies in this quality of integral activity, the relaxed, natural, unified, vigorous, or ardent—full powered—act. If either the athlete or the artist is too tight or too self-conscious or too distracted by the desire to do well, the performance will be impeded. Is not a certain type of relaxation the secret of full power in the golf swing or the singing voice? How often a trainer says, Now just let go and give it everything you've got!

The extraneous tensions have to be relaxed, abandoned, renounced, forsaken, so that "everything we've got" can be directed to the one vital value. All the faculties of the human being in turn—body, emotions, sense desires, personality desires, and so on—are to be purified and pacified. Until there is a certain quietness of the usual jangling and jostling of conflicting stresses in these areas, we cannot be integrated, because we will be scattered, and we will, as we've all observed, *feel* scattered, distracted, fragmented. But by relaxation and quiet attention, by faith and devotion, we can be called back into unity. Now I want to carry this same program further by discussing the importance of quieting the restless activity of the imagination and the mind.

The Power of the Imagination

The imagination is a very important part of us. I don't know whether it quite gets its full due from us, whether we take it seriously enough. You may be aware that Emil Coué (of "Every day in every way I'm getting better and better" fame) said that whenever there is a conflict between the will and the imagination, the imagination always wins. "It is," he said, "an absolute rule that admits of no exceptions. We only

cease to be puppets when we have learned to guide our imagination. Every one of our thoughts, good or bad, becomes concrete, materializes and becomes, in short, a reality."[1] You may try by sheer willpower to do something or resist something, but if you cannot convert the imagination to the desired position, you will probably not attain what you have willed.

The power of the imagination is shown in psychosomatic phenomena—both sickening and healing. Perhaps you have read reports, usually emanating from faraway places, such as the Phillippines or Africa, of people brought into hospitals, obviously dying, but with nothing wrong with them. Eventually it comes out that someone has cursed them or put a hex on them. They have believed in the power of this and their imaginations have done the rest. Medical science has usually been unable to counter the strength of the imagination, and these people have died. Some daring practitioners have fought fire with fire and got the people unhexed. As soon as their imaginations were convinced that the curse was lifted, they promptly got well.[2]

These are extreme cases. The placebo effect, however, is fairly common and is now well known, both as a medical phenomenon and as a social phenomenon. It works in the classroom and the workplace as well as in the clinic. If the patient and the physician believe (i.e., *imagine*) that the therapy will help, then it probably will, even if there is no active ingredient in it that should in itself cause the healing. If a teacher believes, expects, *imagines,* that certain students are bright or that they are dull, the students will tend to perform in accordance with that expectation. Social classes, in general, who are looked down on by others will find it difficult to arouse in themselves the confidence that liberates their talent and competence.

All this is simply to say that the imagination is powerful, and therefore it is important. We *live* out of our imaginations. We may think or wish that we lived out of our intellect

and will, but actually the *proximate* cause of our behavior is the imagination. It is what lies next to our contact with the external or public world. Therefore it is important for us to cultivate the imagination, to take care of it, to feed it properly, protect it, discipline it, train it.

Most of us have always let our imaginations simply run wild. They have grown up without anyone ever giving them any serious attention. The intellect has been trained with scholarship and the will with morality. The feelings have learned to flow in the channels of our culture through socialization. The artistic imagination may have gotten some exercise and direction, but the everyday imagination, what of that? The images that fill our consciousness in our waking and dreaming hours, that govern our world view, our biases and our emphases, our expectations of other people, our interpretations of our experience, and that tyrant of recent years, the self-image.

We need to become aware of the role of our imagination in our everyday inner life. We should spend some time just watching it until we learn what sorts of things it does, and understand how it is connected to our speech, body language, and behavior. We should observe what kind of reveries and fantasies we revolve in our minds when they are free-wheeling. These will accumulate and build on their predecessors until they have constructed a whole world, which for our undiscriminating subconscious mind is indistinguishable from reality.

Thus we can interpret someone's accidental sharp tone of voice as an unfriendly reaction to ourselves, begin to give that person life in our imagination as someone who doesn't like us, therefore be on the lookout for subsequent evidence of hostility, be ready to interpret everything that happens in that light, and of course ourselves show distrust and unfriendliness in turn, which naturally have their effect on the other person; and so by building this thing up in our imagination we can develop a whole atmosphere and relationship of hostility that may be completely false and unnecessary because it all began from something quite accidental. Similarly, by persisting in thinking well of persons, looking for good traits in them, imagining them as pleasant and agreeable, well-disposed toward ourselves, we will enable ourselves to behave in a naturally friendly way to them and elicit friendly responses.

A large area of concern for the cultivation of the imagination is the area of entertainment. What kind of images do we allow entrance to our minds when we go in search of amusement? What kind of books do we read and movies and television watch? What kind of music do we listen to? What kind of dances do we see and do? What kind of sports? What effect do these things have on our spiritual life? It is a large subject and deserving of careful study, but one thing I can tell you: the answer is not "no effect." Everything that ever enters the consciousness has some effect on it and takes up some kind of residence there. Furthermore, there are no thought-tight or feeling-tight compartments in consciousness. Everything seeps into everything else.

Finally, all our problems with poor self-image and unhappiness over our lives are rooted in the imagination. We like to attribute our depressed feelings to circumstances—and indeed there are circumstances under which some people have to live that are enough to depress anyone—but we also know that people can make themselves unhappy in quite neutral circumstances, and on the other hand can rise above an unfavorable quality of life and be happy.

A story I like is that about the gathering in the elevator at nine o'clock on a Monday morning. Here come the business people, the executives and their clerical staff, with their Monday morning blues, looking glum and grumpy. The elevator operator, however, is bouncy and full of good cheer. He greets everyone with a wide grin and a hearty "*Good* mor-

nin'! What a *fine* day!" Finally someone can't stand all this cheerfulness so early in the morning and asks, "What are you so happy about? What's so great about *this* day?" To which the operator replies with enthusiasm, "I ain't never lived *this* day before!"

That's what the imagination can do for you. So it behooves us to guard our imaginations, to train them, to encourage them to feed on inspiring and hopeful fare. In the Epistle to the Philippians we read: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).

That's part of our prayer life. That's a very important part of our contemplative life: the kind of idle ramblings that go on in our minds in the odd corners of the day. If all our psychic faculties, our heart, our soul, our mind, are to be brought to wholeness, so that they can be devoted to love of God, cultivation of the imagination is absolutely necessary.

Our conscious attention wanders about looking for a resting place, a dwelling place, a developing place. We need to prepare a place for it. This is the work of meditation. Meditation is a way of training the attention to adhere to those images and those thoughts which the intellect and will elect to set before it. This is the way we "sit down near" Jesus and stay there without fidgeting long enough to absorb his rhythm.

When people begin to meditate, they sometimes think that it is a kind of self-hypnosis, that because they are exercising the imagination, they are dealing with something unreal. Nothing could be further from the truth. The imagination is in play because we are making things vivid and realistic to ourselves, recreating them interiorly with the richness they could present to our senses externally. But these things recreated by the imagination are not themselves *imaginary,* that

is, untrue. Even mythic materials, as we will see in the next chapter, are *true* and do not deceive us.

But the main point about the use of the imagination in meditation is that the faculty itself is being trained. Our attention and our various psychic energies—images, feelings, affections, ideas, intentions, insights, realization—are always in motion, and need to be focused. In meditation we provide a focus and entice them to adhere to it. We try to make this focus more interesting, more appealing, more attractive, than any of its competitors for our attention. This is why the care of the body and the desires needed to be looked to first, because they are our initial distractions when we try to bring ourselves into wholeness and focus on the "one thing necessary." So these disciplines of training the body and the desires must work together with the practice of meditation.

Meditation Must Be Practiced

Although we have some natural talent for it and will spontaneously fall into it from time to time, if meditation is to be cultivated and brought to the full flower of its potentiality, it must be trained. Considerable discipline and adherence are required. The beginner is usually surprised to discover that what sounds like a simple exercise is rather difficult in execution. And even seasoned practitioners find much to discuss in exchanging notes on problems in their practice. Many of these difficulties can be mitigated by choosing a method that is suited to the mentality and taste of the individual, by finding fresh interest in one's practice through observing one's increasing skill, concentration, and sensitivity to detail, and by exercising the will in patience and perseverance.

However, the American appetite for instant fulfilment will not be gratified. Shopping around for a "crash-course," a marathon workshop that will produce enlightenment in seven extraordinary days, or something of that sort, will not

nurture a genuine contemplative. The relaxation of our compulsive demand for success applies very much to our spiritual exercises themselves. There will be many ups and downs and we must be prepared to take them in stride, learning from both, and always going straight ahead.

The best way to practice meditation is every day, at least once, better twice. Discursive meditations, in which there is dramatic visualization, with reflection and thinking about the significance of the subject matter, can go on for an hour. Nondiscursive meditations, in which there is no chain of reasoning, but the mind holds steadily on a single focus while the affections and the will pour out their energy toward it, can be practiced for a quarter to half an hour. It is often a good plan to begin with the discursive meditation and let it pass naturally into the nondiscursive.

There are many methods of prayer and meditation, and most readers no doubt are familiar with a number of these. However, I would like to offer one that seems to me to combine the good features of several methods. Anyone can easily begin it and it can go on to whatever heights divine grace opens to it.

You begin with a gospel scene in which Jesus interacts with someone. For instance, take the story of Bartimaeus, beginning at Mark 10:46.

> And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; rise, he is calling you." And throwing off his mantle he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me see!" And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you whole." And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

The first thing is to imagine the scene vividly so that the *reality* of the event is appreciated. Play it out in imagination as if you were watching a movie. Then go through the whole scene again, this time entering into the role of Bartimaeus. Take time to do this very slowly, filling in the background and developing the analogy in such a way as to realize that you yourself are spiritually blind and desirous of seeing. How *long* you have been blind, how *much* you have missed, how *eager* you are to see. It is the one thing in life that you desire. You have heard of Jesus and the wonderful things he can do. You are convinced that he can enable you to see. Work on this in terms of your own actual life and selfhood until the desire and the conviction become single, clear, strong, and unshakeable. Determine that if ever you have the chance, you will beg Jesus to give you sight and will not give up begging until you see.

Your life now becomes a matter of believing that if only you could get to Jesus, you would see; your whole life is waiting for him. At last one day he comes. Now there is no hesitation; this is what you have waited for and prepared for. Every energy in you centers in one cry, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" At once there are distractions on all sides, all sorts of voices telling you not to do this. It seems that everything and everyone is impeding you and discouraging you. You do not give up but redouble your efforts.

And then a marvelous things happens. Jesus sends for you. Dropping your cloak, the last of your pretensions, you run to him. Everything is in sharp focus now. You cannot hear

the distractions, you are unaware of any discouragement, barrier, impediment, doubt. The whole field of your consciousness is filled by the presence of Jesus turning his full attention on you.

Really feel this. Feel the full force of Jesus' attention turned on you. You have never met a power of conscious attention like this in any other person. Here is personal presence with fullness. When Jesus gives you his attention, the full power of his personal being is turned on you. *He* isn't distracted, *he* isn't scattered, *he* isn't halfhearted, *he* isn't superficial or casual. The full depth and force of his being are attentive to you. *He* is regarding *you* with *his* whole heart, *his* whole soul, *his* whole mind, and with all *his* strength. Stay there and appreciate that.

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asks. There is the central question: the whole meaning of our life boiled down to one simple question. Are we ready to answer it? Have all our desires coalesced into one great desire, one that is worthy to answer that question when it comes? Here the prayer can turn into nondiscursive meditation, repeating this question and hearing it more deeply each time. We comprehend more and more thoroughly that he really is asking it, with the implication that he will do what we ask, and we reach into the depths of our being for the answer.

As we answer, everything in us concentrates to this single intent, as though our whole being had become a single sharp point. We ourselves are integrated in our attention, answering the fully integrated attention that Jesus directs to us. Our one overwhelming desire speaks.

By this time the prayer has reached a high degree of concentration of thought and energy; we are completely absorbed in it. At the point where we experience Jesus giving us his full attention and ourselves concentrating all the meaning and desire of our life into full attention to him, we pass out of moving time into a kind of enduring present moment

and linger in that moment as long as we like, without moving. The imagination holds steadily on the realization of Jesus' personal being turned toward us, and we ourselves are responding with a whole mind that has no other thought than what we are answering to him. Our attentions, his and our own, are *locked together,* each pouring itself fully and strongly into the other.

What happens beyond this point cannot be spoken: the actual experience of receiving sight, comprehending how faith has led to this breakthrough and wholeness, and the entrance into a new life, leaving everything behind to follow Jesus.

I think this kind of prayer is good because one has less trouble with distractions in it and it actually brings one right into the presence of God and into a personal relation and interaction. The person of Jesus is so attractive and the dramatic situation of calling forth our own deepest concerns is so absorbing that the ordinary distractions one often has to fight in other kinds of meditation cannot present much competition. Also, all our faculties are involved here: mental clarity to size up our lives and fasten on the one thing we do want; the activity of the will in determining to ask for it; the stimulation of faith and conviction and expectation; the liberation of all the affections and emotions when we are brought face to face with Jesus. Everything comes together and comes to its peak.

The afterglow of this kind of meditation, made first thing in the morning, will last throughout the day and support all the other contemplative practices: the guarding of the imagination, the relaxation of egocentric desires and suspicions; attention and energy applied to our work; compassion and good humor in our interactions with other people. We may want to save a few minutes around the middle of the day to recover some of the feelings of the meditation and give ourselves a boost for the rest of the day. The same

contemplation can be repeated in the evening. Or, we might prefer to do a particular meditation for the first time in the evening and then repeat it the following morning.

Meditation is a highly individual affair. One has to experiment a good deal and find something that is real and productive, actually integrating and energizing. Meditation is not a duty to be performed; it is not just a learning device whereby we get ideas; it is not a soothing routine whereby we put ourselves into an altered state of consciousness, or a way of eliciting material from the subconscious so that we can know our empirical personality better. Meditation is a way of meeting God. It is not a matter of thinking about someone who is absent. It is engaging someone who is present, indeed supremely present. It is the realization of this *presence* that is the main point of meditation. The various devices for getting meditation started are all just ways of organizing our total consciousness, our whole mind and heart and soul, and making them hold still and pay attention, without being drawn away by other concerns, long enough to open themselves to the immense reality of the presence of God. Experiencing the presence and reality of God is what it is all about. Anything that can bring you into that is good meditation.

FOUR

♦

The Finite and the Infinite

The traditions of the world that are strong in what we call the contemplative life—a life that leads up to and out from the realization of mystical union with the One and the All—these traditions are also rich in myth and in metaphysics. It is an interesting thing that these three go together: myth, metaphysics, and mysticism. What do they have in common? The union of the finite and the infinite, of the defined and the indefinable.

Myth is a symbolic but concrete presentation of the union of the finite and the Infinite. Usually a story, it may also appear as a ceremony or icon, as building, costume, or dance—or even as landscape. Both concealing and revealing, it is immediately available to the imagination. *Metaphysics* explains theories about the union of finite and Infinite by using concepts and arguments, or by providing phenomenological descriptions followed by reasoning that leads to ontological insight. Many philosophical traditions in both East and West believe that the crucial insight into the basic relation has to come of itself and cannot be captured in concepts and exhaustively explained, although the way to such insight can be prepared. *Mysticism* then grasps the reality directly as a lived experience, without any mediating story or explanation.

All three have to do with the great basic fact of being, that being is both Infinite—transcendent of all form and

God's part to wait and to keep trying is the divine mercy, or pity. Nor is death a cut-off, after which it's too late and God has to give up. God never gives up, but pursues people forever, hoping to convince them that they are unconditionally loved. This is *God's* "radical optimism"!

So I believe that if we try to penetrate this mystery and understand what evil is and how it arises, then we will be in a better position to try to do something about it by offering people unconditional love—the only thing that really works. And even it works only if it is believed and accepted. But preaching against sin, meditating on how bad it is, remorse, and punishment—none of these gets at the root of it, the lack of love; on the contrary, they increase the stress, the tension, the sense of danger and injury.

We can move from a sinful life to a life of divine love only after we ourselves have thoroughly accepted God's unconditional love. Preaching and meditation therefore should be directed to *that*. And we should be careful to stress the *un*conditional. Not: God loves us if we are obedient, or if we believe, or if we join the right church, or if anything, or as anything, or with reference to anything. And we are not to feel guilty over not *fully* accepting God's love. That's a back door way of reintroducing the sense of condition.

So let us contemplate the mystery of the divine love, an original, creative, unconditional love directed to us as our transcendent selves, irrespective of any description we may have or not have. Opening ourselves to this realization and letting it really take hold of us so that we are thoroughly convinced of it, let us feel a great relaxation of tension, of fear, or distrust, as we repose in this sense of absolute security and inpouring eternal life.

SIX

◆

Heart of Jesus, Root of Reality

It was from the nineteenth-century Hindu saint Sri Ramakrishna that I learned to approach the spiritual life from the point of view of conceiving God as both with form and without form. This allows both a dualistic devotion and a nondualistic realization of God as valid. What was special about Sri Ramakrishna was his ability to enter deeply into various religious traditions of the world, ones he found in his own native India and other religious traditions that he knew about. He declared he found them all valid. In particular, he viewed as equally acceptable both the devotional attitude that sees God as one to love and worship, and the mystical experience in which the worshiper is lost in the Divine. Instead of debating the theoretical merits of dualism and nondualism, he claimed to have tested them empirically and found both true.

There has long been quarreling between dualists and nondualists. Eastern spiritual traditions are often hospitable to nondualists; these mystics feel that they and Ultimate Reality, or the Ground of Being, are one. If they speak of "God," they say that in the mystic union it is all but impossible to tell where one's soul leaves off and God begins, so thoroughly interpenetrated is the soul that is taken up into the Divine

Reality. On the other hand, the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, tend to be very strongly dualistic and to hold that there is a great gulf between the Creator and the creature, one that cannot be crossed, one that will remain a barrier for all eternity, no matter how much grace God gives to the creature. So among Western theologians there is great resistance to any form of nondualism such as we find in some Hindu and Buddhist positions. However, it should be noted that not all Hindus are nondualists. Some are adamant in opposing that position. And the average worshiper, in the East, as in the West, is a practicing dualist.

It strikes me, however, that the two are related. Suppose that you believe in nondualism and are determined to try to have realization of God in a nondualistic way. Right away you run into the obstacle of the ego, which prevents you from having the desired realization. In order to overcome the obstacle of the ego, a very useful practice is to have devotion to God in a dualistic framework. You can have devotion to God as the servant of God, the worshiper of God, the instrument of God. All this tends to erase the ego-self, as one becomes the instrument of God—and we see Jesus doing this too. Eventually there is nothing left of self. No matter what you do or say or think, you attribute it all to the agency of God. Jesus himself said that he did not do anything on his own authority: he spoke only what the Father gave him to speak. This helps one get rid of the ego; when this happens, the nondualistic experience becomes available and you're able to say: "The Father and I are one. . . . What do you mean when you say 'Show us the Father'? He who sees me sees the Father."

Now reverse the situation. Suppose you believe in dualism, so you are going to practice devotion to God in a dualistic framework. That means that you have ardent, impassioned love for God. God is the Beloved. And this love relationship deepens as desire increases. You find that love

means that you must ultimately enter into the Beloved's own heart, so that you feel from within everything that transpires there, so that you can look out through the Beloved's own eyes, feel what the Beloved feels, will what the Beloved wills, so that you become thoroughly united with the One whom you love. Thus the very pressure of dualistic love will force you into a nondualistic realization.

Jesus and Nondualism

Jesus wants us to be related to him in a nondualistic way; his whole intention and the whole point of his life is to give himself without reserve to us and into us, so that he may live in us. Is not this the meaning of his prayer:

> "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24)

When Jesus as teacher, as disciple-maker, desires that everyone should be like himself—and that is the goal of every sincere teacher—it means that he wants us to experience his freedom, his interior freedom from all of these inhibitions and fears and cravings and clutchings we've been talking about. He wants us to enjoy his self-realization, his union with the Source of Being, whom he calls Father. It's his own interior experience that he wants to share.

This means that the rest of us are to have this kind of experience. Whatever is reported of Jesus, therefore, is to be replicated in us. Just go through the Gospels and find out what he is like. It's a revelation of what is in store for you, what is expected of you, what is promised to you, and what you in your profoundest reality always already are. What he experiences in his consciousness, we are to experience in

ours. We are to enter into his very heart, the center of his being. Surely this must be what his thorough self-gift means, what being "with him where he is" means, what hearing everything that he has heard from the Father means, what being engrafted into his life so that his blood flows in our veins means.

Entering into the heart of Jesus means also entering into our own heart, the center of our being, the core of our existence. Can we find this in experience, actually do it? Yes, but everything superficial must be laid aside.

We are coming now to the mystical detachment. We are not talking about the usual abstinences, about the avoidance of unkindness to a neighbor, and so forth. We are now going to get into it much more deeply. There are layers and layers of superficiality. Everything, before you come to the heart itself, is comparatively superficial.

Let us retrace briefly the steps we have taken to arrive here. Saved by our acceptance of God's unconditional love for us, we are freed from the need to insist on our personal pleasure and power. We do not make the attainment of possessions and privileges the chief goal of our life. We do not concentrate on the pursuit of bodily pleasures, stimulations, and comforts. We do not identify with our success or failure in our career. We do not refuse to rejoice in God's life because of disappointments in human relations.

Many of the descriptions of the superficial self have thus been stripped off. But they may have been replaced with some new ones: I belong to such a culture, such a religious tradition; I have such a role or office in my tradition; I follow such a spiritual path. And even if these have been transcended, we are left with our sense of our own personality and with our ideas of how the God-world relation is structured: our psychology and our theology. These are much harder to "unknow," and many people hold that we are not to give up identifying with them at all.

Probably not very many Christians would be willing to do what is reported of a certain Zen adept. He was well known as a master in their tradition. But he had in the vestibule of his home a calligraphy hanging on the wall, a beautiful piece of writing, which read: "I have long since forgotten what is Zen Buddhism." He had followed beyond the pointing finger and had seen the moon.

But what else is the contemplative life for? It is where the great risks can be faced, where folkloric religion can be outgrown and the naked Reality entered into by the naked spirit. In the depths of the contemplative life, there should no longer be any secrets, any euphemisms, any tales told to children, but the way should be clear to find the Real beyond finite descriptions.

One contemporary who pursued passionately this quest for the Real was Dom Henri Le Saux, better known as Swami Abhishiktananda, a French Benedictine who lived in India as a sannyasin, or Hindu monk. He has this to say about entering the heart of Jesus:

> As he passes from depth to depth in his own heart, the awakened disciple reaches the ultimate depth of the Heart of Jesus (. . . a pointer to the ultimate recesses of the source of being). Then, passing beyond all, beyond himself, freed from all bonds, even mental ones, he finally comes to the Source where in his eternal awakening he discovers that *he is*.[1]

This surely is a good description of the realization that Jesus himself had, that he is the Son of God who is Yahweh, I AM. He has traced his being back to the Source, which he calls Father, as a personal name.

In India they have pilgrimages on which the devotees trace the sacred river back to its source in the holy mountains above the world. It's a good analogy for our spiritual life.

Abhishiktananda became acquainted with many such things through his contact with Hindu monks. For instance, he learned much about the deeper meaning of I AM from the great mystic, Sri Ramana Maharshi. Ramana taught his disciples to ask themselves repeatedly, "Who am I?" until their habit of identifying with their predicates and descriptions had worn thin and dissolved, and they could unite purely with the unmodified I AM. Abhishiktananda found that distinct traditions do have certain things in common and that they flow together again, even as they came out of the one source. We are all to find that we are the offspring of the One Who Is, and we find this experientially only when we reduce ourselves to a bare "I am" without any predicates whatsoever.

This is a very austere doctrine, and the teachers of the mystic way have little pity for their pupils when they are engaged in revealing to them adult teaching. But there are some gentler approaches to this point.

The Jesus Path

Jesus, as disciple-maker, calls himself the Way, *hodos,* a road. The road is something you can walk on; it gets you from here to there. Jesus is such a path. The passing from depth to depth on the way into his heart corresponds to a passing from depth to depth in our own heart, where "heart" means the core of our existence, not just the seat of the affections. We can walk on this road which is Jesus first by petitioning him, then by studying him, later by imitating him, and by dialoguing with him. But after we have practiced these disciplines for some time, if we are to enter his heart, we must get into his own consciousness.

At first this will be his consciousness of the world, especially of people, their situations, their suffering. Renouncing our attachment to our own temperamental attitudes, we try

to enter into the outlook of Jesus, to see with his eyes and feel with his emotions. We try to share his compassion for all beings, his care, his concern, his will to heal. We can match this contemplation with action, doing things to benefit others.

The level of our ability to help them will be about as deep as our realization of our own true selfhood, so far. In order to help others on a deeper level, we will have to go deeper into ourselves—into the heart of Jesus and into our own heart. Ultimately we must go to the level of Jesus' realization of who he is, and when we do, we will come to a corresponding level of realization of who we are, remembering his prayer that we might be "with him where he is."

So, one must push deeper and deeper into Jesus and let him illuminate deeper and deeper levels of reality within oneself. Very strange things begin to happen as this effort progresses. We start out originally with the image of Jesus in his human form, but as we go into his consciousness, the outward human personality of Jesus seems to expand, as though one were in a spaceship riding into the sun. At the start of the journey one sees the sun out there as a disk, but as we get very close to it, it fills our entire visual horizon. Then we are inside it and it is all around us, and we don't see it as a disk anymore, out in front of us. Similarly, the human personality of Jesus expands and disappears as one enters more and more into the interior of his consciousness, and a complementary transformation takes place also in oneself as in a mirror image. What one *is* transcends what one *does* or what one *says* or what descriptive traits and qualities one *has*.

In this stage, which we may call the prayer of intimacy, what Jesus *is* communes directly with what one is, passing through and beyond the mediation of either's behavior or description. As the descriptions melt and evaporate before the burning radiance of each person's central reality, so the

words that would capture those descriptions fail, and silence supervenes. The two luminosities gradually grow together.

Thus, by meditating on Jesus, on the one hand, and by repeatedly asking ourselves "Who am I, really?" on the other, we begin to renounce our sense of our particular personality, that personality that establishes itself in the world by its distinction from other personalities. And we renounce our pride, our sense of valuing ourselves as someone who is doing something good. We enter into Jesus' experience of himself as an instrument of God: God alone is good, and whatever Jesus does is really the Father's work. Jesus only does what the Father tells him to do, or what he sees the Father doing; or else it is the Father working through him.

This is the way he expresses his own experience, as he tries to describe to other people what it is like. Take, for instance, the time when he was on his way to the house of Jairus. You have to imagine a pressing crowd in the narrow streets. It's like going up the stairs from the subway during rush hour. People are pushing against one another, shoulder to shoulder. Then, all of a sudden, Jesus stops short, stands still, and starts looking around. "Who touched me?" he asks. Peter, not unnaturally, answers, "Master, the crowds throng and press upon you. Why do you ask, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus persists. This wasn't like ordinary touching, he says. He could feel power flowing out of him. What kind of experience was that? It was the experience of being an instrumentality, whereby the healing power of God which was resident in him went out. He felt it migrate through him into somebody else, and he felt himself as an instrument of God.

And we too are called to become like that. We are to feel ourselves transparent, so that this light of the Source can shine through us. It is as though each of us had been a many-faceted crystal, painted over in various colors. We could see how we were different and separate from each other because the colored paint made each of us quite visible—by reflected

light—as an object with definite boundaries. Now the power of renunciation—letting go our interest in our personality and our pride—dissolves the superficial decorations, washes the painted colors away, and lets the light shine *through* the pure crystal. When this happens, the crystal as such becomes almost invisible, as the light pouring through it floods out to the whole environment.

We not only do not take pride in what we do, we are scarcely aware of ourselves as the ones who are doing. We do not reflect upon ourselves in order to *observe that* we are leaving ourselves open to God's work and that such and so is taking place through us. We simply open ourselves and let our whole awareness be of God's life in and through us to whatever the work or expression of divine beauty and goodness is. The more we can make our eye "single" in this way and not let it divide into a double consciousness—partly on God's act of living and working through us, and partly a reflection on how well we're doing—the more our whole being, like the crystal, will be filled with the divine light.

In this way we gradually come to renounce our most fundamental habits of self-consciousness. This is the austerity that the mystic teacher warned was unavoidable. We have to be purified in order to be intent on God's Presence through us to the work. What we are is God's channel of activity, God's manifestation in the world. At this stage, the sense of being a distinct or bounded being begins to get fuzzy, because what and who we are is experienced as the continuity of God's activity in and through us, out to our neighbors.

Entering into the Subjectivity of Jesus

Let me propose another image now. It is the image of the Beloved Disciple, who "reclined on the breast of Jesus" at the Last Supper. Whatever that may have meant historically, I want to envision it a certain way in order to make a point

about our interior attitude. I want to suppose St. John positioned with his back to Jesus. Jesus is behind John, not face to face with him. Therefore, when John wished to move closer to Jesus, for instance to ask him a question, he just leaned back toward him.

We do a somewhat similar thing in our consciousness—at least this is one way of describing it; it can, of course, be represented by all sorts of images and similes. In order to move closer to the heart of Jesus, we "lean back toward" him by sinking back into the depth of our own consciousness, sinking down toward the center of our being. This sinking is done by renunciation, drawn by the entrainment link we have made with Jesus, our having got into his "rhythm."

Each deeper level that we sink to, position our sense of "I" in, brings us closer to the heart or center of Jesus, because it is bringing us closer to our own center. It is as though we begin from the surface of a sphere and retract along a radius toward the center. At the center all the radii meet. As we move back and down and in toward our center, we are overlapping, so to speak, with the reality of Jesus more and more, as we come to corresponding levels of his being. That is to say, he and we are sharing more: more outlooks and attitudes, more feelings, judgments, desires and will, more self-realization. As we regress toward the center, we share more and more. We are *backing up into each other.*

The consciousness of Jesus, the interior of his heart, is becoming more and more "available" to us, "known" to us, "familiar" to us—because our own heart is sharing those same dispositions. We are coming to know the Sacred Heart from the inside, inside his consciousness, and inside our consciousness. And our "inside" is coming to be more and more coincident with his "inside." His Heart is becoming the heart of our heart.

The heart of Jesus is his subjectivity, his subjective consciousness. This is what he opens to us, but we can enter it

only as subjects, in terms of subjectivity. We cannot know it as an object. And here is where nondualism comes in, because the last dualism to go is the dualism between subject and object. To say that we cannot know it as an object is to say that we cannot know it as *another,* as something that stands opposite us that we look at. That is why we do not face Jesus in order to move closer to him, but rather lean back into him. Were we to face him, we would always remain outside him. We do not look *at* him. You can't see a subject that way. "Looking at" would turn him into an object and you would see only the surface of his being, the outside. To know the subject, you have to enter inside the subject, enter into that subject's own awareness, that is, have that same awareness yourself in your own subjectivity: "Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

It is like receiving the stigmata of the crucified. You do not look at the crucified one; you yourself feel the pain in your own body. You become the crucified. Entering the heart of Jesus is like that. You don't regard the experience of Jesus, you become that experience. You yourself experience it in your subjectivity.

This is what gospel meditations are good for, and we can do this with many of these stories. It is especially helpful to take a story in which Jesus indicates what he is feeling, for example, the calling of Lazarus from the tomb, or the healing of the leper. The leper comes to Jesus and says to Jesus that all he has to do to make him clean is to will it. Jesus reaches out and touches the leper and says: "I do will it. Be made whole" (Matthew 8:2–3).

I once made a meditation on this scene with the leper in which I imagined what it was like to be the leper: to see Jesus, to hear his voice as he says, "I do will it. Be made whole." I heard him say that over and over, repeating it with him like a mantram, when all of a sudden I wasn't being the leper anymore. I was being Jesus. And then I felt this enor-

mous will—"I do will it"—this huge divine will to heal. It seemed as though some great power, like a strong wind, was passing through me. And yet at the same time I was myself willing that healing take place. I was willing, it was my will, but it was carried and interpenetrated by that great will which came, it seemed, from somewhere behind me, passed through me, and pressed on to what it would effect somewhere in front of me.

These experiences, of course, are very individual and take quite different forms in different people. But the general idea of actually entering into the experience of Jesus seems to be common to them all. We can make similar meditations on what Jesus feels when he says: "With great desire have I longed to eat this supper [the seder] with you" (Luke 22:15). Or on what he feels when he stands on the hill overlooking Jerusalem and laments: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and reject those who are sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children like a hen gathers her chicks under her wing!" (Matthew 23:37)

If you keep practicing this kind of meditation, letting yourself enter into the subjectivity of Jesus, it will then become a question of how far you can follow him, back along that radius to the center, along the "road" that he himself is: feel the compassion that he felt, desire the salvation of the world with him, see the true meaning of creation with him, with him will that God's will be done, with him grasp that you are the Child of God, the manifestation of the Absolute Invisible Formless One, and with him realize that you simply *are*.

The Heart of Reality

When we come into his heart this way, then we know that he *is* the truth and that we *are* the truth: the coincidence of thought and thing, the union of subject and object, the

interpenetration of "thee" and "me." This is the nondualistic experience. The reality one must know is, in this case, the consciousness of Jesus. One knows it by becoming it, by being it. We wanted to know Jesus intimately, and we have found him in the inmost recesses of our heart, at the center of our being. Found him, that is, not as another being, not as one whom we could look at, but as one who is himself looking out from our center.

After all, we must remember that Jesus' experience of *us* is a nondualistic experience for *him,* from *his* point of view. It is not only that we find ourselves coincident with him; he also finds himself coincident with us. When he wants to know us, he doesn't know us from the outside but from the inside, so that he experiences what we experience as subjects. Instead of looking at us or what we do, he looks at the world through our eyes and feelings and memories. He doesn't make us an object for his knowledge, just as we learned not to know him as object but rather as subject. God doesn't see us as something foreign, as an outsider. God doesn't stare at us.

Swami Abhishiktananda, whom I mentioned earlier, quotes a little verse composed by his teacher, Gnanananda, that says:

> *When I reach the depth of thee,*
> *Oh! What will happen to me?*
> *Oh! What will happen to thee?*
> *When I reach the depth of me*
> *There is no longer thee or me!*[2]

"In the abysses of the heart" to which we feel ourselves "inexorably drawn," says Abhishiktananda, "there is absolutely nothing" we can grasp or base ourselves on,[3] nothing more fundamental to which we can be referred. Did not Jesus say of himself that he had nowhere to lay his head? (Matthew

8:20) There are no more definitions by which our being is specified.

There was a road from our exterior, back through the layers of our being, into the heart. There the knower and the known coincided. We *are* truth. Now, together with Jesus, we realize that we are *life*. Traced back to our Source, we are life in ourselves (John 5:26). It is "the Father" who "has life in himself" and has given to his children to have life in themselves. In Abhishiktananda's words: "Nothing remains but being . . . being, pure light, undivided infinite light, light itself, the glory of being, the fullness of all joy . . . the Joy of Being, God all in all."[4]

> "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24)

SEVEN

◆

The Communion of the Saints

Jesus says to us, "Abide in my love." I am going to interpret this as not so much an invitation to rest and feel secure because Jesus loves us—although that is undoubtedly true—as an instruction to *do* something. I am going to propose that this is another way of putting his new commandment "Love one another as I have loved you." To abide in his love means first to enter into his act of loving by entering his heart, and then to abide there, continually joining him in his activity of loving. We abide in *his* love when we love one another.

In other words, everything that has been said about coinciding with the interior experience and love of Jesus must now be applied to our relationship with one another. This is the meaning of the holy communion. It leads to the holy community, that is, the communion of the saints.

We need to dwell on the fact that the saints are present with us. When we speak of "the saints" we mean all holy people: angelic or human, dead or alive, of our tradition or not—all persons striving to become whole in goodness, truth, and love. We have, perhaps, to some degree lost this sense of the presence of the saints, not just the canonized saints but also the private saints of each one of us—family