Appendix II
Discovering the Interior Life[1]

When the Venerable Lama asked me to stand in for him at this conference, I confess to having felt some dismay at the prospect of replacing one whose whole training, from early childhood, was conditioned by the aim of developing the interior life to the fullest possible extent. Schooled in the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism under its most contemplative form, your chosen lecturer was well qualified to discourse on the means whereby a human soul may be opened to its own latent possibilities of illumination—to the "Kingdom of Heaven that is within you," to quote the phrase used by Christ Himself. It is a real pity that a conjunction of unforeseen causes prevented him from attending your meeting, but this could not be helped; he wishes me to say how sorry he is to have disappointed you. He had, however, told me something about the line he intended to take when addressing you, and this evidently has been some guidance to me. I can only express the hope that what I am going to say ties up sufficiently with the specific question raised in your conference prospectus, namely how to help the young people placed under your care to form themselves in the love and

[1] A talk given at a conference of Catholic religious headmistresses in January, 1968. The Venerable Lama Trungpa, who was to have delivered the lecture, being prevented from keeping the appointment, asked the present author to act in his stead. Given the nature of the audience, no attempt was made to stick to a Buddhist terminology; Pali and Sanskrit words have been replaced by expressions more familiar to Christians. Both sources have been freely drawn on in the shape of quotations and other illustrative material. Emphasis all along has been less on antithesis than on intelligible dialogue.

knowledge of the Lord in a manner that will be not merely conceptual but also effective.

This in fact is a question that concerns us one and all, be we young or old, clever or simple, European or Asian, religious or lay; quite simply, the supplying of an answer to this question is the purpose of religion under all its forms. Buddhism expresses this truth by saying that for any human enterprise to be brought to proper fulfillment, wisdom and method must operate together, as one conjoint principle. They must keep in step with one another; otherwise the enterprise will be frustrated as a result of its own inherent unbalance. The Tibetans convey this lesson by the following parable: Two men were both trying to get to the City of Nirvana, but neither of them could make much headway because the one was blind while the other was lame, so they decided to join forces. The lame man climbed on the blind man's back and pointed out the way (this is wisdom) while the man who had sound legs (this is method) carried his companion along the road. This sets the pattern of every spiritual life; all the rest is but a matter of variable circumstance and detail.

The same idea is expressed traditionally by saying that method and wisdom are husband and wife, who may never be divorced. In the Buddhist iconographical symbolism method is always depicted as a male figure, wisdom by a female. When the two appear together on the same icon, they are usually shown in conjugal embrace, a fact that in the past has often been misinterpreted in an obscene sense by uninformed European observers. Had they but known it, it was their own minds that were thus affected, since these particular icons illustrating what might be called the "mystical marriage of wisdom and method" are regarded by Buddhists as conveying a message of austerest purity; to suspect anything different would, for them, savor of blasphemy.

It is noteworthy that though method is represented as playing the male part in the divine alchemy, that is to say in the process of transmuting the lead of our creatural igno-

rance into the gold of the saving enlightenment, it is wisdom, female counterpart of method, who will first be encountered by the human aspirant, and the reason for this is evident. There must be some kind of initial vision of the truth, a first glimpse of wisdom, before any man will feel impelled to alter the direction of his life by turning his back on the world and its manifold allurements in order to seek God. This change of direction, which the word "conversion" by its etymology expresses, itself implies an initial grace thanks to which one suddenly becomes aware of the futility of one's present state and, by the same token, becomes aware of the possibility of reaching a better and happier state. This grace, the gift of faith, marks the first awakening of wisdom in the soul; automatically it will give rise to the question "What must I do (or avoid) in order to reach a goal I now discern in the dim distance? What road am I to follow?" This very word "what" implies a prayer for method; all the prescriptions, positive or negative, of religion can in fact be grouped under one or other of our two main headings. Its doctrinal formulations indicating what is to be realized and which correspond to wisdom under various aspects, whereas the ritual, moral, and artistic equipment provided by religion may properly be grouped under the heading of "methodic supports" at various levels. The supreme instrument of method is the life of prayer, taken in the widest sense; Buddhists would rather say "the practice of meditation," a matter of terminology that indicates a certain difference of viewpoint but certainly not any essential incompatibility.

In this same connection it should be pointed out that from a Buddhist standpoint a too preponderantly abstract presentation of theological truth is dangerous inasmuch as this can easily degenerate into mere philosophizing, into a mental art for art's sake. A theology offered without its concurrent means of active verification in the soul, that is to say as an isolated wisdom, will at best lead the mind into an intellectual dead end; at worst, it will engender its own opposite,

since typically the world's heresies have all arisen from an unbalanced presentation of some truth or other. Error—a failure in respect of wisdom—will always imply a parallel failure in respect of method and vice versa. One cannot afford to forget for a minute the essential interdependence of the two great spiritual factors. The great value of tradition is that it serves to maintain the polar balance between theory and practice, between wisdom and its effective realization, through calling into play the appropriate spiritual means. If wisdom is by definition concerned with *knowing*, method for its part is concerned with *being*. In fact, one can only really claim to know something by being that thing; to mistake a merely mental appreciation for knowledge is the classical trap of the philosophers. Realization can be said to take place at the moment when being and knowing coincide.

If one were called upon to describe the process of spiritual regeneration or enlightenment as a whole, one could perhaps best qualify it in terms of a circuit, with wisdom calling forth its appropriate method at each stage of the way, with the result that this same wisdom will become integrated in the soul as a henceforth inalienable element of one's being. The way starts from wisdom and ends in wisdom. Buddhism by its own showing offers itself as a series of methods calculated to lead suffering beings more or less directly to enlightenment; this is Buddhism's specific "note."

To give the parallel version: Christ offers Himself to men both as "Light"—another name for wisdom—and as "the Way." "I am the Way." He could equally well have said, "I am the Means." The prayer "Light up our way, O Lord!" sums up man's most essential needs. What we call the interior life is but an answer to that prayer.

Before entering on a discussion of method under its more technical aspects, it would be well to give our attention briefly to two important conditions attaching to any form of contemplative discipline if it is to be fruitful. The first of

these conditions relates to the attitude a man should take up versus nature and the things of nature, whereof he himself is one thing among others; the second relates to what may be called "the mythological mantle of truth," this being one among several means whereby divine wisdom has chosen to reveal its secrets in intelligible form, either in certain parts of Holy Scripture or else through the medium of a traditional folklore, for both these ways of conveying certain truths have been in evidence throughout the world. If our own rationalistic education has rendered us largely impervious to this mode of communication, then it is important for us to reanimate the missing faculty, since a mind that has become closed in this respect will certainly be gravely hampered in its discovery of the life within.

To take the question of man's place in nature first of all: Quite obviously mankind, in order to exist, are compelled to draw on the things around them for their sustenance and in various other ways. As far as that goes, man does not differ greatly from the cow or the tiger or any other living thing, except that his ingenuity in procuring what he wants exceeds theirs, and so do his appetites, a fact that, religiously speaking, is hardly a cause for self-satisfaction; rather should it be deemed a cause for self-questioning.

To suggest, as has been far too commonly the case, that the right to use the fruits of this world's garden, as recorded in Genesis, can be equated with permission to indulge an irresponsible and limitless cupidity, destructiveness, and even cruelty toward our nonhuman fellow creatures is an insult to the Creator, first because it makes nonsense of the statement that "God hateth nothing of what He has made" and second because it restricts the idea of the usefulness of things to their material possibilities alone, and even to only a part of these. Their illuminative uses, as signs or reminders of God's merciful presence, are ignored. The beauty of animals and plants, for instance, and the intrinsic qualities that make of each created thing a unique and irreplaceable witness to

one or other divine aspect—all this is food for the intellect, chosen instrument of intuitive contemplation wherewith man is enabled to behold mysteries far beyond the reach of his discursive reason. It is this transcendent faculty, which since Adam's fall has been as if asleep, that needs reawakening in such a way as to allow all our other faculties of perception and action to group themselves harmoniously around it: The word "Buddha," which means "the wake," testifies to this crowning need. For Buddhists, goodness is first of all *intelligent*, since it leads to God. Sin, on the other hand, is stupid; it proceeds from ignorance and leads back to ignorance, and its mere "badness" pales beside its principal disadvantage, which is to thicken the veil between ourselves and the Divine. Buddhism always tends to see in sin a greater or lesser degree of incompetence and in virtue a proof of skill. A Buddhist would readily agree with the statement that Christian "love," that which makes a man yearn to know God and experience His constant presence already here in this world, is firstly and lastly an activity of awareness. As for the love of neighbor, in which Buddhism includes all that shares in man's capacity to suffer—itself a consequence of separation from the divine center—this is both a logical and indispensable condition of deliverance from suffering through a clear discerning of its root cause; Christ's words "Inasmuch as ye have done so to the least of these, ye have done it unto Me" will always find a ready echo in any Buddhist heart.

A compassionate attitude in both thought and practice toward all that lives is one of the keys of a true contemplation. It is preceded in a Buddhist religious training by intense meditation on the theme of the *impermanence*, including suffering and death, that man and all other creatures have to share. This thought is inculcated early in the Buddhist child; such a remark as "Look at that horrid moth, let's kill it" would be quite unthinkable in a Buddhist home. In Tibet, to swear at a horse or a mule, let alone to beat it, was a thing unknown. Wild animals and birds were mostly half-tame because they

had so little cause to fear their human neighbors, and their peaceful proximity was in fact a particularly powerful factor in molding the spiritual outlook of the people at large—an object lesson in what Eden must have felt like for Adam.

Let me quote you one passage from the writings of a great saint which perfectly sums up the attitude I have just been describing:

> What is a charitable heart? It is a heart aflame with charity for the whole of Creation, for men, for birds, for beasts, for devils, for all creatures. He who has this heart will be unable to remember or see a creature without his eyes filling with tears because of the compassion that grips his heart; and that heart is softened and cannot endure to see even a slight pain inflicted on a creature or to hear of it through others; this is why such a man does not cease praying also for animals, for the enemies of the Truth, for those who do evil to him, so that they may be protected and purified; he even prays for reptiles, moved by an infinite pity which is awakened in the heart of those who assimilate themselves to God.

Surely a world so schooled would be a world far less contentious and destructive than the one we know. But now I must make a confession, since I have been playing something of a spiritual practical joke on you all, if such an expression be not far-fetched! The quotation I have just read out to you does indeed well express the Buddhist spirit, but it is in fact taken from a Christian saint, Isaac the Syrian. The Desert Fathers, the Celtic hermits, and Saint Francis all represent a similar trend. Contemplation of the divine mysteries and a fellowship with nature go hand in hand; this is the point I have been trying to make. And now for the second condition alluded to above, the function of "mythological communication." This need not occupy us long, yet some mention of the subject is indispensable.

Latterly a widespread movement has made itself felt in the Christian West the aim of which, as its supporters put it, is to "demythologize" the church's teachings. This is a most sinister development, one fraught with peril both to faith and to the object of faith, which is none other than truth. This anti-mythological bias proceeds from two evident causes: first, a feeling of defeatism versus modern science, its discoveries and its gibes, and second, an inability to see that it is quite in the nature of things for revelation to use various means of communicating its message, traditions with a mythological form exemplifying one kind of means among others and indispensable in their own place. Every religion contains this element to some extent, and in certain religions—Hinduism, for instance—this enters in very largely, as I was myself able to observe when living in the hills of North Bengal. My gardener, for instance, had a strongly developed sense of the omnipresence of God of which the evidence, for him, was for the most part vehicled by scriptural narratives of a mythological and therefore also timeless character; historical considerations hardly entered in.

Like Christianity and Islam, Buddhism has a strongly affirmed historical framework. The life of the founder can be timed and featured, and its episodes provide the prototype whereon a man's spiritual life is to be modeled. However, even in these traditions there are to be found other concordant ways of conveying the saving message, and the respective Scriptures all include portions that are ascribable neither to the historical unfolding of the religion in question nor to its purely doctrinal side; they narrate mythological happenings which, to be understood, have to be read not physically but metaphysically. This does not mean, of course, that these stories are of human invention and therefore lacking in truth—indeed quite the contrary. Their place in the corpus of revealed truth is guaranteed by the fact that certain lessons can best be conveyed by this means and thanks to the very fact that they take one into a metaphysical dimension

that is as real today as yesterday and will remain equally so tomorrow.

The Old Testament, in particular, is rich in this kind of ever-actual narrative; a mind that can respond aright to such a teaching has to be free of a certain self-imprisonment in time and space. Many people are apt to confuse the miraculous with the mythological, which is wrong inasmuch as a miracle, whenever it occurs, belongs by definition to the order of historical happenings; a miracle is an exceptional manifestation in this world of an influence of a transcendent order on a particular occasion. Those who say they wish to remove the mythological element from the church's inheritance may not admit, even to themselves, that after mythology miracles will be their next target; a false mental association of these two elements will nevertheless make this likely. Where possible, miraculous happenings will be explained away, as by saying of the Virgin Birth that the mother of Jesus was so pure a soul that her purity was "tantamount to virginity" or some such thing. I fully expect this to happen—if this warning proves to have been needless, so much the better! Common prudence, however, requires us to be prepared for this and other similar attempts, for pointers in this direction are now too many to be overlooked by anyone who is not blind.

In the case of happenings that could properly be qualified as pertaining to a sacred mythology, such as the story of the Ark or the Tower of Babel, those who wish to discredit them start off from an assumption that such happenings are either historical or else mere fiction; they can discern no other choice. What they fail to see is that even if these stories be accepted as literal fact, as was the case with our ancestors, this in no wise deprives the stories of their power to convey truth. Where a genuine myth is concerned, its illuminative effectiveness operates outside the alternative "belief or disbelief"; whosoever cannot receive it thus will fail to understand it.

Let the two aforementioned examples from the old Hebrew mythology tell us what they can. First, the Ark. From its description in Genesis 11, complete with measurements given in cubits, it is obvious that a person in the Middle Ages, for instance, had he felt so minded, could easily have found out that a vessel of that size could not possibly have accommodated all the known kinds of animals, let alone the food needed to keep them and also Noah's family alive for forty days or more. Since there is not the slightest reason for supposing that people were more stupid then than nowadays, and good reason for believing the contrary, one has to explain their apparent lack of interest in certain questions of probability or otherwise by the fact that, for them, the dimension of sacred happenings was accepted as a whole, for what it plainly told them; its intrinsic truth shone too brightly to require corroborating through a meticulous canvassing of details. The medieval mind, for all the presence there of human defects as well as virtues, was a *whole* mind, and so was its view of the cosmos; the Gospel references to receiving the truth "as a little child" well describe this attitude. For such a mentality the story of the Ark retains all its intrinsic validity quite apart from any possibility that at a certain moment in time an extensive flood might in fact have overwhelmed part of the inhabited world and thus given rise, in retrospect, to this marvelous story. Its lesson is for all time, for the flood (or its equivalent) is always on the point of overwhelming some section of humanity—today it might well be humanity as a whole that is thus threatened—and escape from the disaster is always by way of an ark of sorts to which only those who fear the Lord can gain admission, because this very fear spells intelligence. The fate of those who become oblivious of God (they may appear to be quite kindly people) is always to be drowned in the consequences of their own forgetfulness.

The Tower of Babel is another such universal myth, also peculiarly applicable to our own time, as it happens. Here again, it is irrelevant whether some ruler in ancient Mesopo-

tamia may or may not have inaugurated an ambitious project of constructing an edifice bigger than ever before and describable as "reaching to heaven." The Empire State Building in New York almost answers to that description, especially on days when the top is swathed in cloud while the street below is clear—in this respect it can emulate many a natural hill. All this remains beside the point, however, because the spirit of Babel is something that is repeating itself continually in human history, in the form of megalomaniac plans wherein man sees himself as the "conqueror of nature" and as the arch-planner who can manipulate the future at his own sweet pleasure. The day some Russian or American spaceman first sets foot upon the moon you can be sure that the world will be treated to a babel of blasphemous boasting exceeding all that has been heard hitherto; for the "confusion of tongues" one has but to substitute "confusion of minds" and the Bible story will be lived over again with almost literal similarity.

It is moreover noticeable that those who have taken part in recent cosmonautical exploits have been alike in one thing, namely that their comments relayed from the heights of space have been of a uniformly abysmal triviality that contrasts disconcertingly with the supposed greatness of their achievement, let alone with the courage these people undoubtedly have shown. This is the story of Babel repeating itself with a vengeance! Who then shall say that this story has lost its relevance for us moderns and should now be "demythologized" into oblivion?

As you doubtless are expecting, the latter part of this discussion will contain some reference to the question of "method" in its positive sense of aiding concentration or, to give it also its negative sense, of overcoming distraction. Needless to say, this is where the Venerable Lama will be most sadly missed by us today, for though still young he has already had a wide experience of handling this matter of practical training in the contemplative art, both in relation to the ever-varying

needs of individual disciples and, at a more external level, when offering general guidance to groups. Though I cannot hope to emulate him in this respect, I can at least suggest that considerable profit may be derived through reading his book *Born in Tibet*. Though this is presented as a personal account of the lama's early life and training leading gradually to his adventurous escape with a band of refugees in 1959, the book episodically contains much that throws light on the power of a steady contemplation to regulate action even under the utmost stress of danger and hardship—a lesson to our contemporary activists. Whoever will but read between the lines will find in this book much that speaks to his condition.

Since we are on the subject of books, I take this opportunity of drawing your attention to another book by a contemporary Catholic author, Dom Aelred Graham, an English Benedictine who spent many years in America as director of a large boys' school. As a result of experience in the practice of meditation in company with some Buddhist friends, Dom Aelred wrote a book[2] to show how certain current Buddhist techniques might be adapted advantageously for Christian use, with the aim of deepening the contemplative awareness of Christians at a time when the pull is mostly in the opposite direction. As you see, his motives and your own are much the same in this respect.

With much sagacity, Dom Aelred Graham has arranged his material according to the plan that is traditional in the Buddhist East; that is to say, he has presented it under the twofold heading of theory or wisdom and of practice or method whereby that same wisdom may be experienced in one's inmost being—the only way to know, as has been said already. Every initiatic teaching, in Tibet or Japan, has always rested on the authority of a particular *sutra* or group of *sutras*, that is to say, on certain inspired treatises or selected portions

[2] *Zen Catholicism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963).

of the Scriptures related directly to the method in question and from which the method itself draws its technical apparatus in appropriate form; normally these *sutras* would be memorized before embarking on the corresponding course of meditation. In Dom Aelred's book this wisdom function is filled by a quite remarkable series of quotations mostly drawn from Saint Thomas Aquinas and disposed in such a way that the subsequent comments about ways and means will at once be recognizable as "enactments" (if one may so use the word) of the truths expressed specifically by those quotations. I feel sure that this book will be helpful to many of you here.

Incidentally, in a talk on this same subject given by Dom Aelred Graham to the Anglican Congregation of Saint John the Divine in Boston he mentioned one fact that will surely interest you greatly. In his school, quite unprompted by himself, a number of the boys came and asked to be allowed to join in a session of what they called "Catholic Zen meditation" each Sunday for half an hour of their free time. Dom Aelred said this had been one of the most moving experiences of his life at the school. What this shows above all is that the young, given the right example exerted through the presence of a revered teacher even more than through any spoken exhortation, may well discover in themselves that very possibility of contemplation that provides faith with its inward dimension and with an unshakable defense. This does not mean, of course, that the spoken or written word has ceased to count, where these profound matters are concerned; what it means is that wherever wisdom at any degree is content to shine with its own light, by an "activity of presence," its communication will be both more clear and more far-reaching.

To return to Buddhists and their practices: Certain methods of inducing a habit of attention or "mindfulness," as it is most commonly called, have been in current use since the beginning, whereof an example is the practice of watching the alternate incoming and outgoing breaths over a longer or shorter period; this method remains classical where begin-

ners are concerned, and it has many variants. Similarly in Hinduism exercises in breath control are in common use, as also a whole body of quasi-gymnastic movements and posturings whereby rhythm and poise are promoted in body and mind together. A number of instructors in these methods have found their way to the West, many of whom, however, offer them as a means of promoting bodily and psychic health apart from any religious purpose. Whatever benefits may accrue from such a restricted application of these methods, the results will always suffer from a taint of profanation, as indeed happens with many things familiar to us today—tobacco smoking, for instance, started as the profanation of a sacramental rite of the American Indians which the white settlers in America prostituted to a mere luxury of the senses. Carried out under proper direction, however, this kind of physical or psychological adjunct to meditation can have great uses, provided the indispensable link with a traditional wisdom is maintained from start to finish.

It is not, however, about this kind of method that I wish to speak today, not being expert in this field. Nor is there much point in discoursing on some of the more elaborate meditative schemes belonging to the Tantric form of spirituality, as found in India and Tibet, for the simple reason that these methods require conditions such as would not easily be realizable in a Western framework, save by exception. I do not think these methods would easily transpose into a Christian medium just as they stand, though theoretically the possibility of adaptation in certain cases need not be excluded altogether. What can be said, however, in a more general way is that in a time of growing alienation and disbelief apparatus of a very complex kind hardly fits the need, which calls for a discipline that is at once "central," that is to say expressive of the most central truths of the tradition, and at the same time extremely concise as to the instruments it sets in motion, thus allowing of their methodic exercise under all kinds of circumstances, be it even the most unfavorable.

Such an instrument is typically represented by the invocation of a sacred name (the Indian *japa*) or else of a short formula in which a sacred name is found enshrined. All the great traditions are agreed in saying that this way of concentrating attention and pervading a person's whole being with continual reminders of God is a spiritual means particularly suited to the needs of the Dark Age, when religion is at a low ebb and the forces of godless subversion seem to be a mounting tide. In Buddhist Japan, for instance, this method is associated with the school known as Jodo, or "Pure Land," in which the name of the Buddha Amitabha (meaning "Infinite Light") is the invocatory means provided. In Tibetan Buddhism a similar means exists in the form of the six-syllabled phrase *Om mani padme hum*, of which the manifold and complex mystical correspondences have caused it to be described as "the quintessence of the wisdom of all the Buddhas"; but time does not allow of more than a bare mention of the sacred formula in question. In the Islamic tradition the name of God (in Arabic *Allah*) is recognized as the spiritual means *par excellence*. Its invocation, in the Sufi confraternities that exist for the sole purpose of fostering the inward life, is known as *dhikr*, remembrance; the Sufi initiations, instituted for this purpose of bringing about the "divine encounter" in the heart all trace back their lineage to the Prophet himself.

Perhaps some inkling of how an invocatory method is intended to operate in the soul may be afforded by recalling the words of a lama whom I met near Shigatse in Tibet when I was staying in the district in 1947. After describing some other methods of a more specialized kind, he offered the following advice: "If a man has been given a particular task to accomplish, this should be carried out with diligence according to the needs of the moment. This having been done, one's remaining time should be filled up with the invocation, leaving no gaps."

Thinking afterward about that lama's advice, it came into my mind that here was a case for applying the lesson

of the Gospel story about the man whom an unclean spirit had just quitted. The text goes on to relate how this unclean spirit wandered away through dry places vainly seeking rest until it began to feel homesick for its previous haunt within the man, so it came back there to find the place empty and nicely tidied up—the text says "swept and garnished"—as if awaiting a new occupant. Then that evil spirit proceeded to recruit seven more wickeder than itself, and they all came to dwell there so that the last state of that man was worse than the first.

Here we have a perfect picture of the process of distraction in the mind. If one distracting thought be expelled, a horde of other distracting thoughts will crowd in to fill the vacant place, for willpower alone will not suffice to fight them off. What is needed is a wholesome presence that will leave no room for anything else of a harmful kind. This presence is the Name and its continual invocation. So long as the Name is there, no unclean spirit can gain access to that soul; let this state become an established habit of unbroken attention, and the agents of distraction will give up the struggle, leaving the man in peace.

After what has been said about the Oriental religions, it will be no cause of surprise to find an analogous spiritual method in the Christian tradition itself; indeed it could scarcely be otherwise, since such a way corresponds to a basic human need, outside all questions of religious form. In fact a quintessential formula of the kind referred to above exists in the churches of the Eastern rite under the name of the Jesus Prayer, being invoked there in much the same way as in the traditions of the farther East and giving rise to a whole spiritual method that goes under the name of Hesychasm, from the Greek word *hesychia*, meaning "tranquility," that peace in Christ that is the recompense of saints in this world and the next.

Probably a good many of those here present will have read a small book published under its English title of *The Way*

of a Pilgrim, its author being an unidentified Russian of the mid-nineteenth century. At that time the Jesus Prayer and its invocation was the lamp lighting up the way of salvation for many pious men and women in both Russia and the Balkan countries. Monastic centers or hermitages where eminent masters of this spiritual art were known to reside attracted a continuous stream of pilgrims drawn from all sections of the population. Such a master was called *geron* in Greek and *staretz* in Russian, both of which mean "old man." The "Elder" Zosima, in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, is a somewhat fanciful portrait of such a master. The most famous center where the Hesychast methods were practiced and taught was the Holy Mountain of Athos, having been so since Byzantine times; but the roots of this form of Christian yoga, as it may well be called, can be traced much further back, to the hermit communities of the Desert Fathers in Egypt and other parts of the Christian East.

In the eighteenth century a specially selected collection of Greek texts from the Fathers was compiled and first printed in Venice under the name of *Philokalia*, its purpose being to provide the appropriate sapiential foundation for those following the Hesychast way. This collection was soon translated into Russian, being also slightly modified in the process. Two sizable volumes of extracts from this book exist in English, translated by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer. I recommend this book to your notice with all my heart.

The Jesus Prayer itself consists of a single sentence, which runs as follows: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me" (or "on us" or "on me a sinner," since all three variants exist). Quite evidently, this formula sums up the essentials of the Christ-given wisdom in relation to human need; as a Buddhist would say, this is an *upaya*, or spiritual means, of the greatest efficacy and power. It is equally evident that as far as the prayer itself goes, it is accessible and appropriate to every baptized person as such; moreover its conciseness makes it suitable for all possible occasions—even in the presence of

scoffers and persecutors it can be pronounced unobtrusively, just as it also lends itself to being whispered by the dying with their last conscious breath.

Seeing that the Jesus Prayer belongs historically to Eastern Christianity, it may be asked by some whether its transplantation to the West at this late hour would be entirely appropriate, using it of course in its Latin translation of *Domine Jesu Christe Fili Dei miserere nobis*. Could not the rosary, as an existing Western form, fill the same purpose? This is a question I do not feel prepared to answer outright. All one can say is that "invocation," in the methodic sense given to its practice in the East, seems to require a maximum of concentration in the form so used, so that a more extended formula, though not inferior *per se* since it relates to the same wisdom, may not in practice lend itself quite so well to the purpose the invocation is intended to foster. According to one spiritual master, the natural equivalent for a Western follower of the method might well be either *Christe eleison* (which in effect is a compressed form of the Jesus Prayer) or else simply the twofold name *Jesu-Maria*, whereof the concentration of both light and power is too evident to require comment. Another point to note in this connection, one that has an important "technical" bearing on this whole method, is that the less the formula used lends itself to rational analysis, the better will it match that inward synthesis of which it is destined to become the operative support. It is the holy name, sonorous presence of the divine grace enshrined in the formula, that is both the source of its power to illuminate and a sharp sword to cut off ignorance and distraction at the root. The name when treasured in the heart may be likened to a spark of that same uncreated light that shone into the faces of the three Apostles on Mount Tabor and out of which, as the Hesychast tradition itself teaches, the crowns of God's saints both here and hereafter are made.

In point of fact, a number of Catholics known to the writer have long been using one of the above forms of invocation, and there is no reason why others should not follow their

example, if so minded. In Greece and Russia the Jesus Prayer can be invoked on a rosary or else aloud or silently according to circumstances; with those in whom the invocation becomes fully operative, the formula begins to repeat itself spontaneously in the heart, by night as well as day. Christian saints have testified to this fact, and so have Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim saints who have followed corresponding methods; in every case it is a divine name that is at the center of the process, being first the apparent object of invocation and then becoming its subject, until finally the subject-object distinction disappears altogether. This, as Buddhists would say, is the consummation of the marriage of wisdom and method in the heart—but here words fail entirely, and only silence remains to express this supreme experience.

One question relating to the invocation is likely to be put by some; those who have written from actual knowledge in this connection have been almost unanimous in emphasizing the need to practice this method under direction of a spiritual master who has himself proceeded far along this way. As in the case of those following one of the Indian forms of yoga, an intending Hesychast disciple is warned of dangers that might arise from an unguided use of a spiritual instrument of such great inherent potency, for instance through the development of unusual psychic powers whereby attention might be diverted from "the one thing needful" to the ego of the person himself, as proud possessor of the powers in question; this is always a danger, especially when a man is passing from the elementary to the more advanced stages of a spiritual training, when the bodily faculties have been considerably disciplined but the far more elusive psychic faculties are still half out of control. For this reason, it is far better to work under direction of a qualified master who thus becomes, for the disciple, the earthly representative of Christ in relation to the method and should, as has been said again and again, be treated as if it were the Savior Himself who was imparting the instruction. Given this need for qualified direc-

tion, it may well be asked where today is such direction to be sought? For it is in no wise to be supposed that qualification for this spiritual office somehow goes with the priestly office, the latter being sacrificial and ritual but not *per se* connected with the initiatic function of a "director of souls." If the sacerdotal office represents the organized side of the tradition, the office of spiritual master represents "the spirit that bloweth where it listeth"; if the spiritual master happens to be a priest and monk (as in fact has usually been the case in practice), this must nevertheless be accounted an "accident" in respect of his special vocation.

When I was preparing this talk, I often put to myself the question "What shall I answer if I am asked where qualified guidance may be found by a Christian seeker today?" This is admittedly a difficult question, but in fact, the Hesychast Fathers had already foreseen this contingency long ago, for after dwelling at length on the imperative need to find a master and put oneself under his direction, they add that if despite all efforts no master is found, the aspirant is not to despair but is to practice the Jesus Prayer with fear and love, instructing himself where possible through reading. As they say, he must throw himself confidently upon the mercy of Christ the Lord, imploring him to be his instructor, and if the aspiration be a genuine one, surely God's grace will come to the man's aid. One is never justified, however discouraged one may feel, in behaving like the man in the parable who only received one talent; one cannot compel the grace of God, but one can always keep oneself in the disposition of responding to it if and when it chooses to manifest itself.

Properly speaking, it is the interior life itself that chooses the man, not the contrary—let this also be remembered. To wait upon the Lord by day and by night is already to be well on the way. There is no time or place where man is left devoid of all spiritual opportunity, unless it be that he himself refuses or ignores the divine mercy that surrounds him.

"Discovering the Interior Life"

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