

PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION AS ORTHOPRAXIS

Arnold Toynbee once predicted that when future historians write about the twentieth century, they will not consider the discovery of atomic energy, man's conquering of outer space or the new advances in medicine, but the meeting of East and West on the level of religious experience as the most significant event of the century.¹ In fact, it is evident from the number of books being written, university courses being given and Eastern centers in the West being opened, that Western interest in a wide variety of Eastern forms of religion, spirituality, philosophy, as well as Eastern methods of prayer, meditation and contemplation is growing by leaps and bounds.

Several Christians highlight this Eastern turn in significant ways. For example, the German Jesuit, Hugo Eunomiya Lasalle, has lived in Japan for over fifty years. He has written on Zen, Yoga and Christian mysticism.² But most important of all, while remaining a Christian, he has been leading a Zen way of life under the direction of a Zen master to experience firsthand the compatibility and/or incompatibility of Christianity and Zen.

In a similar fashion, the Benedictine monk, Bede Griffiths, has spent over twenty years in India as a believing Christian, but leading the life of a Hindu holy man, again to experience directly the compatibility and/or incompatibility of Christianity and Hinduism. His recent book, *Return to the Center*,³ should be read with this background in mind. Nor should one forget the pioneering work of his fellow-Benedictine, Dom Aelred Graham, who had praised the religions of the East long before this was in vogue.⁴

The Irish Jesuit, William Johnston, has been in Japan for over twenty-five years. Perhaps no one has written so clearly and convincingly of the need for Christianity to take Zen's values seriously.⁵ Johnston maintains, moreover, that in ecumenical meetings of Christians and Buddhists, it is not theology and philosophy that provide the basis for mutual understanding, but the values embedded in silence, contemplation, humility, poverty, peace and non-violence.⁶ Spiritual experience, therefore, can provide at least the starting-point for genuine East-West dialogue.

¹ See William Johnston, S.J., *Christian Zen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p.1.

² See his *Zen Buddhismus* (Köln: Bachem, 1972) and *Zen: Weg zur Erleuchtung* (Vienna: Herder, 1965).

³ *Return to the Center* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate, 1977). See his *The Golden String* (New York: Kennedy, 1954).

⁴ See his *Contemplative Christianity* (New York: Seabury, 1974); *Conversations: Christian and Buddhist* (London: Collins, 1969); *Zen Catholicism: A Suggestion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963).

⁵ See *The Still Point* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); *Silent Music* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); *The Inner Eye of Love* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). See also footnote 1.

⁶ Johnston, *The Still Point*, p. xiii.

To be sure, the life and writings of the Cistercian monk, Thomas Merton, should not be overlooked in this matter.⁷ Merton was a prophetic figure in many areas, but especially so in his positive evaluation of the religions of the East.

Daniel O'Hanlon, a participant in this seminar, spent his sabbatical year in the East immersing himself daringly in various currents of Eastern thought, practice and life-style. One can read a fascinating account of this highly fruitful sabbatical in past issues of *The National Catholic Reporter*.

Very early in the Christian Church's life and development, she had to face the influence upon her own life of Greek life, thought, spirituality and values. A certain Hellenization of Christianity took place, both enriching nascent Christianity and posing certain dangers to its identity.⁸ The early Church could not and did not turn her back on what Greece meant for her life, practice and thinking.

So, too, with today's Church. The religions of the East have already begun to penetrate Christianity, enriching the Church and presenting certain dangers. Perhaps the fact that many young people have turned to Eastern religions is an indication that the Holy Spirit may work an Eastern awakening within Christianity itself. To a certain extent, Vatican II has facilitated this turning to the East by its openness to the holiness, wisdom and truth which it acknowledges can be found among the great non-Christian religions.⁹

The theme of the CTSA convention is "Christian Orthopraxis and the Emergence of new Meaning in Theology." Perhaps the easiest way to avoid entering the dispute centering upon the exact meaning of the word "orthopraxis" is to assert that its meaning is as rich as the word "myth," for example, and simply to define orthopraxis as right doing or the right conduct which flows from deliberation and choice. And if orthopraxis is right doing, then Christian prayer, meditation and contemplation form an essential part of Christian orthopraxis. And since the *lex orandi* is the *lex credendi*, the specific way in which Christians pray, meditate and contemplate constitutes an important element for theological reflection. If Christian prayer, contemplation and meditation are being influenced by the great religions of the East, this Eastern flavored Christian orthopraxis will lead to the emergence of new meaning in theology, a meaning which is perhaps still too incipient to explicate. Both William Johnston and Karl Rahner are correct, moreover, in emphasizing the necessary reciprocal relationship between theology and living spirituality.¹⁰ As Christianity's living spirituality becomes

⁷ See especially *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1967); *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968); *Gandhi on Non-Violence* (New York: New Directions, 1965); *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, ed. by N. Burton, P. Hart and J. Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973).

⁸ See Johnston, *The Still Point*, p. xiv.

⁹ See "Declaration of the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by Walter M. Abbott, S. J. (New York: American Press, 1966), esp. paragraph 2

¹⁰ Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love*, esp. the first three chapters; Karl Rahner, S.J.

more decisively stamped by the great religions of the East, this means a turning point for theology perhaps even more significant than early Christianity's turn towards Greece.

I

I've selected Anthony de Mello's fine book, *Sadhana: A Way to God. Christian Exercises in Eastern Form*,¹¹ as the basis of this seminar, "Prayer and Contemplation as Orthopraxis," for a variety of reasons. The first reason centers upon de Mello himself. He is an Indian-born Jesuit priest who studied philosophy in Barcelona, psychology in Chicago, and spiritual theology in Rome. He has worked over fifteen years as a spiritual director and retreat master and currently directs the Sadhana (meaning "technique," "discipline," "spiritual exercise") Institute of Pastoral Counselling in Poona, India. These factors contribute to the unusually creative blending of Eastern and Western spiritual currents in his recent book.

The second reason I selected this book is that it is perhaps the best book available today in English for Christians on how to pray, meditate and contemplate. Perhaps its greatest value resides in providing a well-needed "technology" of prayer, meditation and contemplation somewhat lacking in the Christian tradition. With this book, even a relatively inexperienced spiritual director can teach people to contemplate God in a quiet, wordless, imageless way. People with relatively little prayer experience might be able to teach themselves to pray more deeply and simply by using this book, although the personal guidance of someone more experienced is always desirable. Moreover, although de Mello wishes to move prayer out of the head into the heart and emphasizes a minimal use of words, images and thoughts for communication with God, he does not denigrate the more conventional Christian ways of praying to God with words, images and thoughts. In fact, he offers new methods in this regard.

Still another reason for focusing upon de Mello's book is the number and variety of people both studying it and using the exercises he proposes. This book has found its way into monasteries, convents, prayer-groups, classrooms, conventions and even non-believing professional groups.

De Mello's book contains forty-seven easily self-taught exercises to foster a person's communion with God in a variety of ways. These exercises, moreover, promote physical, psychological and spiritual stillness and quiet. By helping a person to banish distractions, to become more aware of the bodily dimension of prayer, to awaken a person affectively and in phantasy, these exercises foster greater awareness, concentration, depth and simplicity in prayer.

The first five exercises center upon awareness, especially awareness of one's silence or lack of silence, bodily sensations and breathing.

Theological Investigations, Vol. 16; *Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1979).

¹¹(St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978^o).

De Mello especially favors the awareness of bodily sensations for its special value in rooting a person in the present and its value in promoting general well-being and relaxation. De Mello would have us become aware of the different sensations throughout our bodies in much the same way that a young boy fishing has his consciousness virtually in the tips of his fingers holding the fishing line.

The second section, "Awareness and Contemplation," contains nine exercises to awaken a person's mystical heart and to move prayer out of the head into the person's center of mystical intuition. In this section, de Mello attempts to give some theoretical justification for his assumption that to experience God, one merely needs to become aware of his own sensations, or that focusing on one's breathing results in the same experience as the Christian prayer of quiet.

The next section offers eighteen fantasy exercises wherein the person attempts to relive (not merely remember), for example, the joyful or sorrowful mysteries of her own life. Properly done phantasy exercises, according to de Mello, increase our perception and appreciation of present reality. These exercises are especially good at releasing and healing past emotional hurts and resentments which still affect a person's life on the unconscious or preconscious level.

The final section contains fifteen devotional exercises more explicitly religious in focus and content than the previous ones: for example, the "Benedictine" method of sacred reading, meditation and prayer, the Jesus prayer, vocal prayer and the like. In this section, de Mello attempts to make our lives as God-centered as was that of Jesus.

Although de Mello is a Jesuit, his book reverses the Ignatian progression from more complex to increasingly more simple methods of prayer. Ignatius of Loyola usually recommends in his *Spiritual Exercises* five exercises each day.¹² The first is normally a meditation or contemplation upon a specific mystery in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The next exercise is often a repetition of the previous exercise by concentrating upon points of previous consolation or desolation. The exercitant is also called upon to make a resumé, or summary, of the previous exercise. Finally, Ignatius would have the exercitant end each day with an "application of the senses" to that specific mystery to see, hear, touch, taste, smell in imagination or with the spiritual senses something of the divine mystery. De Mello, on the other hand, begins with very simple awareness exercises and progresses to the relatively more complex devotional exercises. The Ignatian rhythm goes from greater activity and complexity to increasingly more simple and passive prayer. De Mello attempts simplicity from the outset.

II

Another reason why I selected de Mello's book for this seminar centers upon a few of his major assumptions to which I wish to address

¹²See *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. by A. Mottala (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964).

myself. First of all, he maintains that these awareness exercises will bring about

... a change in oneself that seems effortless. All the virtues you formerly tried to attain through the exercise of your will power seem to come to you effortlessly now—sincerity, simplicity, kindness, patience... Addictions seem to drop off without the need for resolutions and effort on one's part: thing-addiction like smoking and excessive use of alcohol, person addiction like infatuations and overdependency.¹³

Despite my Jesuit background, rooted in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius with their emphasis upon resolutions, decisions and even a daily purpose of amendment from the examination of one's conscience, I definitely agree with de Mello that the silencing of ego functions, awareness alone, will change a person for the better. To stop our incessant internal dialogue with ourselves, to check our clinging to thoughts and to be simply aware without clinging, bring about unexpected psychosomatic changes. Simply to silence the mind, or to let all pass through it as nonsense on a screen, or to focus upon sensations or breathing awakens a person's core to new levels of energy and harmony. In fact, a person soon reaches the point in and through these exercises where she must change her life or stop these exercises. Or he may simply change for the better in much the same way that a person who exercises physically on a regular basis loses his taste for certain foods, beverages and nicotine.

De Mello also maintains that the simple awareness of one's silence, sensations or breathing can be Christian contemplation in the strict sense, i.e., communication with God with a minimum of words, concepts and images.¹⁴ To experience God, he contends, all one has to do is to be aware of one's silence, sensations or breathing. A person may obtain the same mystical results from these awareness exercises as from praying over the mysteries of Christ's life, death and resurrection. Furthermore, the experience resulting from these awareness exercises is identical to that resulting from the Christian prayer of quiet. On the other hand, de Mello modestly states that if one cannot accept these statements, to do these exercises simply "as a means for disposing yourself for prayer and contemplation or just ignore these exercises altogether and move on to others in this book that are more to your taste."¹⁵

I would maintain somewhat more strongly than de Mello, however, that these awareness exercises can be Christian contemplation in the strict sense, but they may also remain merely psychosomatic techniques which bring peace, tranquillity and concentration without any reference to or communication with God. To go back to an illustration used above, the boy fishing may have his awareness centered upon the sensations in the tips of his fingers holding the fishing line, but that experience

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53; see also p. 94.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30, 42.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

certainly is not prayer. Boris Spassky may have done Zen exercises to improve his chess concentration, but any Zen master would call that *bopu* ("bastard") Zen, beneficial, but not done with Buddhist faith. Many contemporary books with purely secular goals present exercises similar to that of de Mello.¹⁶ They help people to relax and to become integral, but they are no more related to God than the frequent "high" I have received from strenuous jogging.

In short, I am not contesting the value of de Mello's exercises for their psychosomatic benefits, for the peace and silence, elimination of distractions and the preparation they provide for deeper Christian prayer and contemplation. To imply, as de Mello does, however, that all one has to do to experience God is to experience one's silence, sensations or breathing is not sufficiently nuanced. Many Christian mystics, Ruysbroeck for example, knew of a non God-directed natural rest during mystical prayer which presented certain benefits and dangers to the Christian.¹⁷

More to the point, I am saying that awareness exercises can be Christian contemplation in the sense of communication with God, if they are done in faith, hope and love. The faith, hope and love stance of the one doing these awareness exercises ultimately determines the God-centered quality of the experience. A Christian may implicitly bring a faith, hope and love stance to these exercises, but de Mello should be more explicit about this. These exercises should be used by a Christian to root her faith, hope and love stance more deeply. But a person may breathe or become aware of his sensations with or without faith, hope and love, and this distinction remains crucial to the resulting experience. And I have first-hand knowledge that this is so.

Although the fourteenth-century anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* recommends placing all created things in a cloud of forgetting so that a cloud of unknowing can arise between God and the contemplative, he does this so that the tiny flame of love may become more deeply rooted in the contemplative.¹⁸ The radically apophatic mysticism of the *Cloud of Unknowing* depends upon the stance of love, the other-directedness of the contemplative, for success. To overlook the explicit God-directed stance in the Christian apophatic mystical tradition is to short-circuit an essential dimension of Christian contemplation.

III

The most serious reservation I have with respect to de Mello's book is his seeming unawareness of the variety of mystical goals which can be reached through prayer, meditation and contemplation. The question must be asked: "What or whom has the one exercising experienced?"

¹⁶ See Eugene T. Gendlin, *Focusing* (New York: Everest House, 1978).

¹⁷ *The Spiritual Espousals*, trans. by Eric Colledge (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), book II, c. xlii, pp. 170-73.

¹⁸ *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. by William Johnston, S.J. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973).

It can be argued, for example, that some mystical experiences never get beyond an experience of the self, in the Western sense of the concept self. Martin Buber has clearly described this experience of self:

Now from my own unforgettable experience I know well that there is a state in which the bonds of the personal nature of life seems to have fallen away from us and we experience an undivided unity. But I do not know—what the soul willingly imagines (mine too once did it)—that in this I had attained to a union with a primal being or the godhead. This is an exaggeration no longer permitted to the responsible understanding. Responsibly . . . I can elicit from those experiences only that I reached an undifferentiated unity of myself without form or content. I may call this an original pre-biographical unity and suppose that it is hidden unchanged beneath all biographical change, all development and complication of the soul . . . this unity is nothing but the unity of this soul of mine. . . .¹⁹

Buber argues, therefore, from his own experience that he experienced his own "pre-biographical unity" of spirit which supports and subsists beneath all biographical change. I wholeheartedly support his position.

Another perceptive writer, Yves Raguin, puts the matter at hand this way:

The important thing here is to realize that my depth is deeper than I am. But at the same time I may plunge into myself and never find anything more than myself. The self, in fact, is so deep that it can engulf me without my ever realizing there is something further. . . . It is easy to see why so many mystics lose themselves in themselves and never meet God.²⁰

The self, therefore, can be a delightful trap for the mystic who may end up settling for far less than the one true God. He may immerse himself more and more into a form of narcissistic ecstasy by losing himself in himself "and never meet God." To know oneself or to experience oneself, therefore, is not necessarily to know or to experience the One who is more intimate to myself than myself. One noted writer on mysticism, R. C. Zaehner, has provided ample illustrations from Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity to underscore the self as an eventual mystical dead-end.²¹

A noted neo-Thomistic philosopher, Pierre Scheuer, provides the metaphysical-psychological grounding for this experience. He says:

Spirit tends to have an intuitive consciousness of itself in such wise that it will be at once both subject and object, without the judicative or the discursive process. . . . It is in the passage from the discursive processes of reason and of consciousness to the intuitive function that a "natural" mysticism is verified.²²

Natural mysticism, therefore, flows from the human spirit's ability to grasp itself intuitively. Fundamental to human consciousness is being

¹⁹ *Between Man and Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 24.

²⁰ *The Depth of God* (St. Meinrad: Abbey, 1975), p. 66.

²¹ See especially "Standing on a Peak," *Concordant Discord* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

²² *An Interior Metaphysics: The Philosophical Synthesis of Pierre Scheuer, S.J.*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Shine, S.J. (Weston: Weston College Press, 1960), p. 127.

present-to-itself, active self-identity, or another way of stating St. Thomas' *reditus a seipsum*.

Because the human person is essentially spirit-in-world, with spirit having a transcendental relationship to world, a mystical experience of the *unity of all created things* is possible. Perhaps the paradigm of the spirit-in-world mystical experience is the Zen *satori* experience, defined by Thomas Merton as "a kind of natural ecstasy in which our being recognizes in itself a transcendental kinship with every other being that exists, and, as it were, flows out of itself, to possess all beings, and returns to itself to find all being in itself."²³

Deep within the human spirit exists a basic relationship to all things which experientially comes to the fore in *satori*. Even in less intense forms than *satori* is this experience verified in experiences of nature through which many feel their close unity with all created things. Karl Rahner has written convincingly of the human spirit's "pancosmic" relationship with the unity of all things at the moment of death.²⁴ Perhaps *satori* and nature experiences are more intense forms of the human spirit's pancosmic relationship to all created things which reaches its high point in and through death. And yet, Rahner cautions against confusing an experience of the human spirit's oneness with the world with an authentic experience of God.²⁵ On the other hand, I would ask whether *satori* might not possibly be an experience of the ground of all created things, an experience of the silent God, a *Seinsmystik* in its most profound sense. And yet, because Zen Buddhists always describe their *satori* experiences in terms of enlightenment, clarity and the cessation of all desire, this should give pause to those who wish to equate the experience of *satori* with Christian mystical love of God.

To highlight still another way in which de Mello might nuance his position, I wish to call attention to the doctrine of one writer on mysticism, Walter T. Stace, who contends that: "Not only in Christianity and Hinduism but everywhere else we find that the essence of the experience is undifferentiated unity, though each culture and each religion interprets this undifferentiated unity in terms of its own creeds or dogmas."²⁶ Much too hastily, Stace reduces all mysticism to an experience of undifferentiated unity, to a union without difference between what is meditated and the one meditating. And much too facilely, Stace draws too sharp a distinction between experience and interpretation, as if interpretation were not an essential moment of the experience itself and an intrinsic component of future experiences. Stace, moreover, never asks why different religions can have dogmas which allegedly contradict the fundamental experiences of that religion.

Stace's doctrine, too, overlooks the existence of a whole variety of experiences of oneness. Although de Mello would not necessarily agree with Stace, I would contend that the mystical experiences of mystical merging, mystical dissolution, absorption, entasy, ecstasy and indwell-

²³ Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, pp. 17-18.

²⁴ *Theology of Death* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), p. 19.

²⁵ *Schriften zur Theologie*, Vol. 12 (Zurich: Benziger, 1975), p. 400.

²⁶ *The Teachings of the Mystics* (New York: New American Library, 1960), p. 21.

ing are qualitatively different. De Mello would do well to make this clearer in his next work or a revision of his present one.

I would further maintain with one Jungian psychologist, Erich Neumann, that the true mystical path requires "extraordinary exertions of the ego and of consciousness"²⁷ because the temptation to fall into a "drunken disintegration and blurring of consciousness"²⁸ which attempts to "kill the ego by a process of mystic dissolution by urorboros incest"²⁹ or that state of perfection represented by an egoless unconsciousness"³⁰ is so intense.

In less technical terms, a mysticism resulting from the *heightening* of consciousness must be distinguished from one which *dissolves* this consciousness. Is the "high" from alcohol one bit of the mystical consciousness, as William James contends,³¹ or is it not the other end of the spectrum of mystical consciousness, an example of pseudo-mysticism resulting in physical, psychological and moral decay?³² Can the experience produced by sniffing glue, for example, be compared with the experience engendered by long, Yogic discipline? They are as worlds apart as are fainting and the intensity of Yogic awareness.

To take but two of many possible examples, Teresa of Avila knew of a false mystical quiet exhibited by some of her nuns who had fasted too much and kept excessive vigils.³³ She insisted that these nuns pray less, eat more, get more sleep and do more manual work to heal their psychosomatic disintegration and to place them once more on the road to genuine mystical prayer. Ignatius of Loyola's classic letter of June 1549 to Francis Borgia concerning the mystical excesses and false prophesies of Father Onfroy contains invaluable information on the discernment of spirits.³⁴ The Christian mystical tradition is a continual reminder that the issue of degenerate pseudo-mysticism which has only superficial similarities to genuine mystical experience cannot and should not be taken lightly.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, moreover, is basically correct when he insists that "Christianity alone therefore saves . . . the essential aspiration of all mysticism: *to be united* (that is, to become the other) while remaining oneself."³⁵ Jesus himself said that he and the Father were one, but he also said that he was in the Father and the Father was in him. St. Paul spoke of Christ living in him. In short, the language of indwelling, not of monistic merging, flows from the Christian love mysticism of a union with differentiation. The mystery of love is that two actually

²⁷"Mystical Man," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 30 (1968), p. 404.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 403.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 399.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 379.

³¹*The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: New American Library, 1958), pp. 297, 295-306.

³²See Harvey D. Egan, S.J. "The Cloud of Unknowing and Pseudo-Contemplation," *Thought* 54 (June 1979), 162-75.

³³*Interior Castle*, trans. by Allison Peers (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 92-93.

³⁴*Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. and collected by William J. Young, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University, 1959), pp. 196-211.

³⁵*The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 116.

become one, and yet remain two. The heightened sense of union during mystical love ecstasy also gives rise to a heightened sense of one's own identity, something attested to by all Christian mystics. For example, on the basis of his experience, John of the Cross describes transforming union as "the union wrought between the two natures is such that even though neither change their being, both appear to be God."³⁶ The Christian mystic becomes God by participation, but does not lose his identity by an absorption into the Godhead.

Quite simply, de Mello's book would be stronger, if he had called attention to the possibilities of quite varied mystical experiences: some of one's own self, of the unity of the universe, of the silent God, of the God of love, and of the regressive, or the pseudo-mystical, kind.

IV

I would also maintain that de Mello more than implicitly accepts the Eastern view that evil is really nothing more than a dream. De Mello seems to equate evil with ignorance or lack of awareness. The Christian mystics are unanimous, on the other hand, in their radical sensitivity to the mystery of iniquity. A strong sense of sin and evil permeates their works. This is one dimension of the Christian faith which de Mello should deepen in future editions of his book.

I disagree with de Mello, too, when he asserts that Christ appeared only "to those who had faith in him"³⁷ and that Christ's "office as redeemer is over."³⁸

Perhaps he could pay more attention to the importance of various bodily postures and offer specific instructions in this area. I would suggest underscoring one's psychosomatic rhythm and the different phases of one's life and incorporating these into the theory and practice of meditation and contemplation. Finally, despite de Mello's distinctions on pages 30 and 76, I suspect that he has too easily by-passed the importance of the historical dimension of the great Christian mysteries. Christianity is a celebration of God's mighty deeds which reached their highpoint in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christian prayer, meditation and contemplation cannot reduce these mysteries to mystical interiority or mythic experience by dissolving their essentially historical dimension.

In view of de Mello's excellent book, I would suggest two extreme positions to be avoided. The first is the tendency among certain ultra-conservative Catholics to react violently to anything from the East as being pagan, demonic, or merely "natural." One need not subscribe to all aspects of Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christian" theory to know that the grace of God has incarnated itself in a variety of ways outside of official Christianity. As mentioned above, too, Vatican II has confirmed that there is much wisdom, holiness and truth in the great non-Christian

³⁶ *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. by K. Kavanaugh, O.C. and O. Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D. C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1973), p. 497.

³⁷ De Mello, p. 78.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

religions. In fact, it seems obvious that Christianity still has much to learn from the East.

The other position to be avoided, however, is that there is practically nothing of value in the Christian mystical heritage and that the East has it all. A "retrieve" of our own mystical tradition, a tradition much deeper and far richer than many Christians realize, is also essential today. Moreover, we cannot assimilate Eastern spirituality, practices and techniques without an alert Christian discernment of spirits. Much from the East needs to be washed, baptized and tested before its final Christian incorporation. Discernment of spirits still remains a key factor in today's orthopraxis.

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