

BY MORTON T. KELSEY

Pastoral Counseling and the Spiritual Quest*

There are at least six quite different ministries within the Christian church. All of them are legitimate and needed. The basic problem is that most lay people at least unconsciously expect their pastor to be an expert in all of them. Without the gift and ministry of administration the church organization would cease to be. Without the teaching ministry the basic message of the church would not be communicated. The prophetic ministry reminds us of the areas of life which have not been touched by our Christian outreach. Quite different from these is the ministry of liturgy which orchestrates a group into meaningful worship. And then there is the essence of the pastoral ministry. Finally there is the ministry of spiritual guidance in which the pastor tries to facilitate the individual in his spiritual quest. This requires additional training and expertise different from ordinary counseling and is a much needed and little provided ministry within the Christian Church today.

In order to see the relationship between pastoral counseling and spiritual guidance, let us first of all look at the need for it that has been expressed among modern Americans. Then let us see the problems which are posed by recent non-experiential theology. We shall then offer a world view which has a place for religious experience and the altered state of consciousness. We shall point out the difference between much of Western meditation and Eastern non-Christian meditation. We shall conclude with a description of meditation through imagery.

Interest in the Spiritual Quest

There is a growing appreciation of the need for spiritual guides who are also trained as pastoral counselors and therefore know the methods of dealing with individuals and groups in a meaningful way. The California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Menlo Park, California is trying to reach over into this area from the secular side. The Committee on Priestly Life of the United States Catholic Bishops prepared a paper for the Catholic Bishops meeting in November 1976. That document was published by *Crux* in their November 15, 1976 newsletter. The Benedictine Abbey in Pecos, New Mexico has begun a training program for spiritual directors. Five times as many people, lay and clerical, applied for training at Pecos as could be accepted. Wainwright House in Rye,

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New York, is planning such a program for training spiritual guides beginning in September of 1978.

The purpose of spiritual direction is to bring men and women into touch with the central meaning of the universe and to enable them to relate all aspects of their lives to this meaning. There was a time when people could be given a rational view of the universe which they could accept and integrate. For many generations the church believed that most people would accept a view of the universe on the authority of the church and live according to the dictates of authority. As long as most people still have faith in reason and authority the task of spiritual direction is relatively simple except for those who have made a special vocation of the life of prayer and contemplation.

However, many modern men and women have lost their faith in both reason and authority as sufficient explanations of life and reality. This is particularly noticeable among intelligent college students. Twenty years ago one could speak dogmatically to students at Notre Dame and they would listen. Today such a presentation of the Christian faith would not even be considered. Dr. Alan McGlashan in *Gravity and Levity* suggests that "the current conflicts of youth against age and authority are in essence a revolt against *smugness*, against the closed, superior attitude of mind which assumes that somewhere there is always a final truth to be found, if only reason is followed patiently to its conclusion. Youth in some unconscious or intuitive way has tuned in to the physicists' discovery that there is no final truth to be found anywhere, that reality in the last resort is ambiguous, open-ended, a recurring balance of contraries."¹ The modern person of whom the modern youth is a harbinger demands experience as well as reason and authority. Reason and authority are taken seriously only when experiences can be provided to offer verifications.

Thus the person who would provide meaning for the questing modern person must be a facilitator of experience as well as being able to provide a coherent world view. The pastor of seeking, modern people needs to be able to provide methods to attain transpersonal experience which support the world view suggested. In addition he needs also to be able as any pastoral counselor to relate to people in a way which engages the whole person and helps the individual through conflicts and depersonalizing emotional problems.

Theology and the Spiritual Quest

At this point we run into a very serious problem. Few theological works in the last two hundred years have any place for Christian experience. John Macquarrie's *Twentieth Century Religious Thought* carefully critiques one hundred sixty theological thinkers from 1900 to 1960.² Only two of these Baron Von Hügel and C. G. Jung, stress the importance of experience within the religious journey. Thus the spiritual director must

¹Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976, p. 11.

²New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

be able to put together a theological framework of his or her own which has a place for religious experience. Skill in philosophical or theological formulation is not often found in conjunction with pastoral skill. On the one side there are the psychologists (and sometimes even pastoral psychologists) which have nothing to say about transpersonal experience and, on the other side, there are the spiritual directors who know Christian mysticism, but who know little about the complexity of human nature or how to distinguish between neurotic and spiritual problems. For nearly thirty years my personal interest and work have been directed toward bridging these two areas.

It is truly amazing to see how Christian theologians have ignored the religious experience of people, the experiences which involve perception of something different from the space-time continuum. Andrew Greeley received a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation to add a group of questions on mysticism to a national random sample questionnaire of some sixteen hundred respondents. The results were quite surprising even to this priest sociologist. Some 39 percent of people replied that they had had mystical experiences. The experience was carefully defined using the four characteristics proposed by William James in the *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

On post-test recheck the investigators discovered that half of these people had never told anyone of their experiences prior to the test. This was because they feared ridicule from the secular world. He also found that the last person they would tell about their experiences would be professional religious people. The respondents felt that these people didn't believe in such things anymore! Also built into the questionnaire was a scale to test psychological maturity. Far from being regressive personalities, those who had many mystical experiences had a very high correlation with emotional maturity. A similar study in Great Britain by David Hay and Ann Morisy working out of Manchester College, Oxford and the School of Education at the University of Nottingham, provides very comparable results. It is interesting to note that these figures are similar even though only one-third the number of people attend church in Great Britain as attend in the United States.

The modern human being is far less secular than many thinkers have believed. I have no firm statistics about the use of hallucinogenic drugs among people under twenty-five. My experience at Notre Dame leads me to believe that somewhere between two-thirds and three-fourths of this populace have used marijuana. Half of these have used something stronger. According to Dr. Andrew Weil, in his book *The Natural Mind*, the present-day drug culture is an attempt to provide altered states of consciousness which religious institutions no longer believe in or provide.³ My students concur with Dr. Weil's basic thesis.

Meditative attempts to secure transpersonal experience have become so common that a Gallup Poll was taken on this subject in 1976. Some eight million Americans had tried Transcendental Meditation or some

³Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972

other form of Eastern religious practice. Some five million had been involved in some form of Yoga. Three million Americans had been involved with the Charismatic renewal and another three million in some other form of "mysticism." Nearly 10 percent of the American populace have been searching for some experience which our religious institutions do not seem to provide. And yet I heard the head of one of the leading Catholic seminaries, when presented with the Greeley data, remark: "I do not see what mysticism has to do with training seminarians."

There is a development in psychology which takes account of this kind of experiences. Robert Ornstein's *The Psychology of Consciousness* is one example of this trend which shows an interest in the studies of the bicameral brain as well as the other data of transpersonal experience.⁴ The paper of Eugene d' Aquili and Charles Laughlin, Jr., in the March 1975 issue of *Zygon* takes these considerations into the study of religious ritual. Their paper is entitled "The Biophysical Determinants of Religious Ritual Behavior."

Another View of Reality

It was Aldous Huxley who provided the first popular framework for understanding the importance of hallucinogenic drugs. After taking mescaline, he reflected upon his experience and wrote these words in his book *Doors of Perception*:

Each person is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment, and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to be practically useful. . . . Most people, most of the time, know only what comes through the reducing valve and is consecrated as genuinely real by the local language. Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of by-pass that circumvents the reducing valve. In others temporary by-passes may be acquired either spontaneously, or as the result of deliberate "spiritual exercises," or through hypnosis, or by means of drugs. Through these permanent or temporary by-passes there flows, not indeed the perception "of everything that is happening everywhere in the universe" (for the by-pass does not abolish the reducing valve, which still excludes the total content of Mind at Large), but something more than, and above all something different from, the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as complete, or at least sufficient, pictures of reality.⁵

It is very difficult to perceive what we do not expect to see. Bruner and Postman's study "On Perception of Incongruity: A Paradigm" points out that anomalous playing cards like a red six of spades are not easily recognized.⁶ If this is true of ordinary sensation, how much more true it would be of accepting reports of altered states of consciousness which do not fit into one's world view or paradigm.

One reason why the data of parapsychology have not been taken more seriously is that they do not fit into the ordinary paradigm of the Western

⁴San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1973.

⁵New York: Harper and Row, 1970, pp. 22-24.

⁶*Journal of Personality*, 1949, 18, 206-223.

world. In this point of view only physical reality is real and objectively verifiable sense experience alone provides real knowledge of the physical world. Any talk of another dimension of experience or reality is considered talk about illusion. This is particularly clear in the behaviorism of B. F. Skinner, but it is also apparent in many existential psychologies.

In 1955 Robert Openheimer was asked to address the American Psychological Association. His address, entitled "Analogy in Science," pointed out that psychologists were unreasonable to base their psychology on a model of physics which physics had abandoned. Twentieth-century science has become less and less certain about the ultimate nature of matter and far less sure that there are not other dimensions of experience. There is no longer universal certainty about all experience being essentially reducible to material reality. The new uncertainty is traced by T. S. Kuhns in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.⁷ Even in mathematics "Godel's Proof" has put an end to universal certainty about mathematical truth. The scientific community is entering a new era of far less materialistic dogmatism and far more openness to talk about other dimensions of experience.

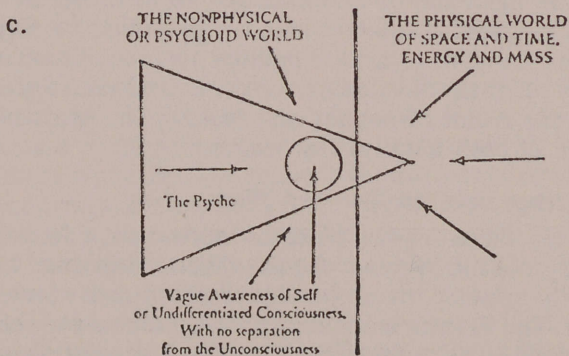
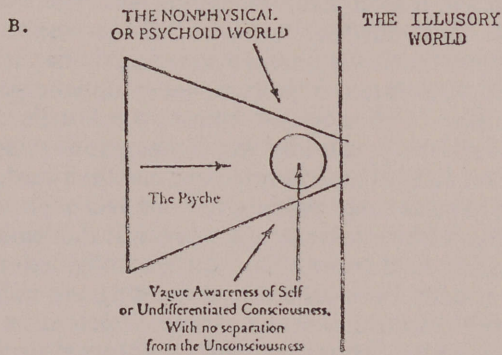
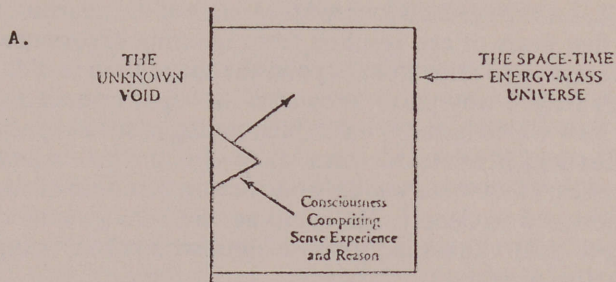
For several centuries the Western intelligentsia believed that the material world alone was real and the spiritual-psychological-nonphysical world was illusion. Our brothers in the East held largely the opposite point of view. The physical world was illusion and the spiritual world alone was real. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and many other Eastern texts assume this point of view. It is my suggestion that both dimensions are real and the task of the spiritual guide is to deal with both of them. This can be shown diagrammatically in the following chart. A represents the premodern Western viewpoint where only the space-time-energy-mass world is real. B represents the point of view of the East in which only the spiritual world is real. Our suggestion is that both realms of experience are real and that the human psyche has legitimate access to both modes of experience. This is represented by paradigm C. I have elaborated the implications of this diagram in my books, *Encounter with God*⁸ and *The Other Side of Silence*.⁹

It may seem that we have belabored the theoretical aspect of the spiritual quest. Human beings are more consistent in the long run than we ordinarily believe. Unless, however, one provides a paradigm which gives meaning to one's actions within a total context, it is difficult to help another person upon an independent investigation of spiritual reality. Once one can provide such a paradigm, one can also direct one's critical capacity toward an understanding of altered states of consciousness or nonsensory data. Physical science offers this kind of understanding of sensory data. Obviously, if there are legitimate experiences relating to another dimension of experience, the spiritual guide should have

⁷Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

⁸Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1972

⁹New York: Paulist Press, 1976.



experience in this realm or his guidance is a case of the blind leading the blind. Such practice would be like a chemist who had never stepped into a laboratory teaching organic chemistry.

Dr. C. G. Jung also discovered that much of the neurosis in people over thirty-five years of age resulted from ignoring experiences of meaning which seemed to arise from beyond the space-time world. Thus there is another reason why pastoral counselors ought to have some kind of a world view which includes an understanding of such experiences and the practices which relate to them. Indeed, Jung told me in a personal conversation that there was only one reason that he investigated this area of experience so deeply. He could not find clergymen equipped to or willing to deal with patients whose neurosis involved being cut off from spiritual experience.

Plato in the fourth century B.C. laid out a philosophical framework for the world view we are describing. He pointed out that, in addition to sense perception and reason, humankind was endowed with mathematical intuition and also with four forms of "divine madness." This was madness in the sense that it was unreasonable and similar in its givenness to sense experience. The forms of it were: the prophetic perception, the healing or cathartic intuition or perception, the artistic understanding and, maddest of all, the perception which was given to the one in love. Poets and artists of all ages have pointed out that their inward perception was of a reality beyond their making. No one has expressed this more clearly than William Blake as he struggled against the tendencies toward rational materialism in the early days of the Enlightenment.

Religion has usually been an attempt to bring the individual into a creative relationship with ultimate meanings which are experienced in altered states of consciousness as well as through ordinary sensory channels. Men and women have spontaneous religious experiences as Greeley and others so carefully report. Religious ritual is yet another way of using the right side of the brain and so involving the individual in image-thinking and a different kind of perception, as Eugene d'Aquili and Charles Laughlin, Jr., have pointed out. Meditation is still another method by which the individual attempts to deal in an active and creative way with the realm of nonphysical reality. The spiritual guide needs knowledge of both kinds of experience.

The Difference Between East and West

Essentially there are two kinds of meditation, one characterized by Eastern Mystics and by some schools of Western spiritual writers, and the other by the general stream of Western Spirituality both Catholic and Orthodox. The Eastern method involves quietness and seeks to come to imagelessness. It is typified by TM, Zen and several other forms of Buddhism. The other form understands the image as a form of psychoid reality which cannot be superseded. Indeed, ultimate religious experience can be expressed by images in the same sort of inadequate way that sensory experience and images describe the physical world.

Various systems of Western meditation attempt to facilitate the

individual in his interaction with that world. *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola provide one example of this kind of meditation. Loyola's genius consisted more in the form that he gave the exercises than in any original contribution. He was giving form to the general practice of the ten centuries before him.

If, indeed, there is another dimension of reality, it is important to know something of its nature. East and West view it differently. The East on the whole (and all generalizations are only partially true) sees ultimate reality as cosmic mind with which one merges and so loses one's ego identity. Christianity in its most characteristic practice perceives the core of the universe as love with which one relates. The first path leads to imagelessness and to the loss of much of one's sense of individuality and separateness. The second never transcends the use of images in meditation and leads to an enhanced sense of individuality achieved through an encounter with God. One's method of spiritual direction will depend upon one's view of ultimate reality.

Several modern schools of therapy have used the image method of meditation for psychological goals. Assagioli has provided the method of psychosynthesis and Jung has suggested the method of active imagination. Jung's method has been elaborated by Walter Wink in his excellent book, *The Bible in Human Transformation*,¹⁰ and by Elizabeth Howes and Sheila Moon in *Man the Choicemaker*.¹¹ I have tried to relate the same method to the classical Christian devotional method in my book *The Other Side of Silence*. The basic idea of this point of view is that emotion expresses the depth of the psyche and can be dealt with creatively only as it is allowed to reveal the image hidden within it.

Both Eastern and Western methods suggest the importance of relaxation and silence, of detachment and the asceticism of quietness. Imageless detachment often becomes an end in itself in the East, while in the West one returns after silence to the image. The image is seen to lead the individual not only to the depth of the human psyche, but also to the psychoid world which impinges upon us human beings.

Jung describes his method of active imagination in an answer to a question during a seminar which he gave in England in 1933 and is reported in his book, *Analytical Psychology, Its Theory and Practice*.¹² He was treating a young artist who needed to untangle his life by using imagination therapeutically. The patient was an artist and usually gave his imagination free reign. He learned how to use it by looking at a poster and imagining himself in the poster among the cows on a hill in the Bernese Alps. Then he imagined he was passing over the brow of the hill and down the other side, over a stile at a hedge and around a rock until he found a chapel. There on the altar was a statue of the mother of God and just in a flash he saw something with pointed ears disappear like a flash behind the altar. When he questioned his experience it disappeared, but he

¹⁰Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973.

¹¹Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973.

¹²London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1968

discovered that, returning to this experience, the same content repeated itself. The moment he went over the brow of the hill he encountered unconscious data. His imagination was expressing something real within and perhaps even beyond the artist. And so he learned how to use his imagination for psychological purposes. This method, of course, embodies the same principle utilized in the Rorschach and TAT tests.

Five Methods of Meditation

I have found five different ways in which this form of meditational activity can be used with people who are seeking spiritual guidance. Sometimes they are helpful with college students who, because of involvement in the drug culture, have been precipitated into contact with this reality at an early age. They are important psychological and pastoral tools. I have given examples of each of these methods in the last chapter of *The Other Side of Silence*.

The first method is that of entering into the mythological story. I use myth in the way that C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams have described it—as a pattern of reality which can be revealed either in imagination or in history or in both. By stepping into the biblical or mythological story imaginatively one can share in its power and transformation. One of the great values of liturgy is that it is an acting-out of a mythological pattern. It is religious play in which the participants step into the very reality of that pattern. One of the reasons that many people get little value from reading the Bible and other religious literature is that they read with the head rather than imaginatively stepping into the story. One can imagine one's self going with Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem and realize how hard it is to have the Christ child born in one, an arduous task with rejection all along the way, and then even a flight into Egypt. Coming into the religious way is not easy. Or one in deep depression over loss can imagine oneself in the garden of resurrection with Mary and share with her in the experience of joy and victory as she met the Risen Christ. One can step into the story of the Samaritan and the man who fell among the thieves or any other parable. Since the biblical stories all point toward victory, stepping into them can facilitate the possibility of victory within the individual's life.

A second way of using the imagination meditatively and therapeutically is by the inner dialogue. Many schools of psychotherapeutic thought have suggested dialogues with dream symbols to allow these symbols to reveal their meaning and affective value. Progoff stresses this kind of method in his writing on the Intensive Journal. Gestalt therapy uses the same method. It is only a step from this to the religious colloquy of Ignatius Loyola in which one dialogues with the Risen Christ or the Virgin or some other religious figure. One can dialogue with one's favorite saint or any religious figure in any religious tradition. This can open up a level of meaning which can hardly be reached in any other way. Such an exercise may even bring one to a relationship with a highly creative level of the objective psyche external to one's own personal psyche.

When Jung was passing through his own dark night of the soul

following his break with Freud he discovered that as he allowed his affect to be expressed in images he was able to deal with it in a creative way. The very problem of moods is that they are so amorphous and unconfontable. James Hillman in his profound study of human affect, *Emotions*, has shown how deeply related inner images are to emotions.¹³ As one is able to allow the mood or image to express itself in an image, one can sometimes begin to deal with the emotional situation. One can gently lead the imaginary situation toward a positive solution. When this occurs the worst of the mood of anger or fear or depression is often dissipated. One friend found that, only as the novel which he was writing could be brought to a non-tragic solution, did his own inner emotional situation begin to heal and mend. One can seldom become what one has not first of all conceived imaginatively.

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a magnificent example of such imagination written in superb poetry. Dante moves from the dark of his inner fears to the white rose of paradise as Helen Luke shows in her study of Dante, *Dark Wood to White Rose*.¹⁴ Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is another example of imaginative working-through of one's inner psychological and religious problems. St. John of the Cross' "Stanzas of the Soul" is another example of such creative imaging. Many people find this method of dealing with their inner reality incredibly creative and transforming.

The dream is the natural altered state of consciousness. Paying attention to the dream is a fourth method of meditational practice. The dream often reveals the depth of one's self through images and pictures and stories. One does not have to have expertise in dream analysis to find meaning in one's dreams. One student gave me a series of dreams which charted the way for him through a time of crisis and transformation. He never had an hour of analysis. In his book *The Savage and Beautiful Country* Dr. McGlashan asks the question: "Who is the dreamer within who provides a picture of inner condition and the health of one's relationship with the outer as well as the inner world?"¹⁵ Understanding the dream can become a kind of imaginative play in which one finds one's inner direction. One can also start with a negative dream, imagine and nudge it in a more positive direction, and actually change the quality of the human psyche and its relationship to the world around it.

And, finally, there is the method of becoming quiet and coming to observe the flow of one's inner life. Both by sensory deprivation and through concentration on a symbol or mantra one can step out of ordinary experience and observe the flow of images which can ordinarily be found in dreaming. Since one is more conscious during meditation, one can more easily alter the flow of images within this state. It is also possible to bring the image of a healing and transforming figure or power into one's meditative situation. This can change the direction of the inner imagery and also the general direction of the personality using this method. It is

¹³Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1961.

¹⁴Pecos, NM: Dove Publications, 1975.

¹⁵Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

nearly impossible to bring a person to religious creativity until that person has first imagined the possibility and expressed it imaginatively.

This process can be experienced not only in writing, but in drawing, modeling clay, weaving, dance and sculpture. Through this method one can often come into touch with deep and often hidden aspects of the personality and integrate them into a creative solution to life.

Guiding others on the spiritual quest should certainly be one area of expertise for the pastoral counselor. Since modern theology offers but little help in providing a framework for such practice, the pastoral counselor is faced with the difficulty of forging his own synthesis. Likewise he needs to learn methods of meditational techniques which have been all but forgotten not only in Protestant but also in Catholic practice as well. One cannot ethically guide another in such an understanding where one has no experience one's self. The field is wide open and there is great need. Guiding people on the spiritual quest would appear to be one of the most important and distinctive areas in pastoral counseling in the decades to come.