

TO HEAL THE EYE OF THE HEART

By DONALD McCHESNEY

A

RT, SAYS T. S. Eliot, conquers time. Even words and music which live in time and are spread out in time by form, pass into eternity:

Only by the form, the pattern
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.¹

I want to examine the possibility of applying this dictum to life — our own individual lives — and adapt Eliot's words to develop the theme that only by the form, the pattern, does our own life reach the stillness, and move finally for all eternity in its own stillness which is the secret of its own deepest identity. We live in time and undergo our experience in time. Sometimes, time is 'one damn thing after another', and very frequently because of circumstance and our own natures, life in time is thwart, perverse, contradictory and difficult. Nevertheless, what we make of all this time-stuff belongs to eternity — one day our life-time will terminate, and the predominant form of it will stand revealed.

In an article on Blake, Kathleen Raine, herself a poet and mystic, says:

The highest of the arts is life itself and it was Blake's belief that we should live at every moment in and from and by the imagination. Not all are poets and musicians, but every man, woman and child may, by living in every act and moment of life, by the 'inner light' of imagination, create the thing itself of which the arts are only images — the state of Paradise, the golden age. . . .²

The insistence on *every* moment and every act of life being governed by the inner light is perhaps a trifle rhetorical. Life is too full of business and destruction for this. However, the basic idea is fruitful that life

¹ *Four Quartets* (London, 1954).

² *The Ampleforth Journal* (Summer, 1971), part 2.

itself is the highest of arts — a gentle and sometimes lifelong wrestling with the stubborn, weak, recalcitrant, contradictory, thwart or obsessional elements of our own individual nature, which is the material upon which we work. The 'work' is to bring it all into harmony, into tune, or more fundamentally (traditionally), to bring it into conformity with the will of God, which is in fact not an alien will, but the secret of our innermost identity, ground of our being. 'Our whole work in this life', says St Augustine, 'is to heal the eye of the heart by which we see God' — adding that by the same process we become aware of our deepest selves. Clement of Alexandria puts it the other way round, but arrives at the same conclusion: 'It is then the greatest of all lessons to know oneself, for if one knows himself, he will know God'. 'Find the door of your heart, you will discover it in the door of the kingdom of God.'

It seems to me that whatever else we can do in life, one artefact which we can all produce, though we will never see it, is holiness of life in this sense of something produced with pain and labour and joy out of recalcitrant material over a long period of time. Not an alien perfection either, but something moulded out of the deepest and most personal grain of our fundamental stuff.³

Some great artists, lacking perhaps the resistance to despair which is built into the resurrection, have not considered it worthwhile — the living of life, I mean. 'Once out of nature', wrote W. B. Yeats, 'I shall never take my form from any natural thing'.⁴ He was speaking half ironically of the pain of old age, but he was also speaking of the pain of being flesh and blood. He always found great difficulty in reconciling the 'complexities of blood and mire' of actual living, with the longing of his intellect for form and order and the tranquillity of eternity. He could not reconcile the two spheres, and decided that instead of having another round of flesh and blood existence, he would much prefer to be made of exquisitely wrought gold or other immortal and perfectly painless substance.

A more professedly christian writer, Thomas Merton, likewise points to the two spheres of time and eternity, but says that in the life of faith

³ 'In each soul', says Teilhard de Chardin, 'God loves and partly saves the whole world which that soul sums up in an incommunicable and particular way. But this summing up, this welding are not given to us ready made and complete with the first awakening of consciousness. It is we who, through our own activity, must industriously assemble the widely scattered elements. . . . Thus every man in the course of his life must not only show himself obedient and docile. By his fidelity, he must build — starting with the most natural territory of his own self — a work, an opus onto which something enters from all the elements of the earth'. *Le Milieu Divin* (London, 1960), p 32.

⁴ *Sailing to Byzantium*.

they are gradually reconciled. His language is less meaty and metaphorical than Yeats, but he speaks of the same matters:

As long as we are on earth, our vocation is precisely to be imperfect, incomplete, insufficient in ourselves, changing, hapless, destitute and weak, hastening towards the grave.

But the power of God and his eternity and his completeness and his glory must somehow find a way into our lives secretly while we are here, *in order that we may be found in him eternally as he has meant us to be.*

And in him, in our eternity, there will be no change (in the sense of corruption), but there will be unending variety, newness of life, progression in his infinite depth. There, rest and action will not alternate, they will be one.⁵

Merton seems to be saying that in the very process of time and life, with all mortal confusion and frailty we are, if our will is good, working towards our own form, our own identity, in the eye of God 'as he has meant us to be'. In this sense, in the christian life, 'the impossible union of two spheres' is actual and the unbridgeable has been bridged. 'If the material totality of the world', says Teilhard de Chardin, 'includes energies which cannot be made use of, and if, more unfortunately, it contains perverted energies and elements which are slowly separated from it, it is still more certain that it contains *a certain quantity of spiritual power* of which the progressive sublimation, *in Christo Jesu*, is, for the Creator, the fundamental operation taking place'.⁶ So long as the will is turned Godwards, no matter in what weak or fragmentary fashion, we are assisting in this process and are living implicitly in the dimension of eternity as well as that of time. Hence the dictum, 'Make perfect your will'.

In *The Four Quartets*, Eliot waxes lyrical about those whose will is already perfect, and who live all the time in the dimension of right action: the saints, whose will is immersed in the will of God, and who therefore live consciously and clearly at 'the point of intersection of the timeless with time', the Eternal Now of Paradise:

... to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for a saint —
no occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selfishness and selflessness.⁷

⁵ *No Man is an Island* (London, 1960), p 115.

⁶ Cf *Le Milieu Divin*, p 93.

⁷ *Four Quartets*.

Possibly so. I have a feeling that the language here is a trifle heroical, rhetorical — 'a lifetime's death in love, ardour and selfishness and selflessness' — and is out of touch with any real known individual human life. Eliot perhaps wishes that it could be so and the wish is father to the style. He is certainly nearer to the human condition when he describes the lot of most of us, which is the odd flash of insight at odd times, the unattended moment:

For most of us there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning,
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
Then it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts.⁸

Most of us probably do not even have the 'unattended moments' with any degree of regularity, moments when we see into the heart of things, either because we are not of the mystical temperament or else we do not apply ourselves to the spiritual regime Eliot prescribes, of 'Prayer, discipline, thought and action', for a life which is to become authentic, self-aware and not totally immersed in slavery to its own fantasies and the movements of the surface world.

Even the spiritual regime prescribed by Eliot can become simply a higher form of self-indulgence, as W. H. Auden said when he launched his gibe at the mystical Eliot of the *Four Quartets*:

Coward: for all your goodness game
Your dream of Heaven is the same
As any bounder's.
You hope to corner as reward
All that the rich can here afford,
Love and riches and bed and board,
While the world founders.⁹

I doubt if Auden's comment, made in the excessive social righteousness of his communist days, is justifiable, except to illustrate the inevitable ambivalence of every human activity, prayer and self-denial included.

Yet, without some drive towards form, towards making perfect the will, life cannot be any other than formless, arbitrary and 'driven', 'moving in appetency upon metalled ways of time past and time

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *From a Communist to others* (London, 1933).

future'.¹⁰ In order to avoid an existence describable only in terms of one damn thing after another, there must be some attempt made to create a life-shape out of what Yeats called 'this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world', despite the fact that the only certain quality of existence may be what Heidegger calls its 'thrownness'. 'Thrownness (*geworfenheit*) is an inescapable, if absurd characteristic of man's way of being. He is like a die that has been cast — by nobody. He arrives in life by no choice of his own, and finds himself moving towards death with every minute that passes':¹¹ that is, we are thrown into it — it is necessary to make something out of it.

This contemporary quest for shape and form has been expressed as the search for the 'authentic' life. What is involved in being 'authentic' and the means to attain authenticity have been variously described. Speaking in christian terms, the well-trodden and well-charted paths of traditional spirituality — penance, prayer, self-denial and self-discipline — still remain for those who can find their way in them; for example:

My son, complete self-denial is the only road to perfect liberty. Those who are obsessed by self-interest and self-love are slaves of their own desires; they are greedy, inquisitive and discontented. They spend themselves in pleasures but never in the service of Jesus Christ, their whole interest being in passing affairs. But all that is not of God shall perish utterly. Observe this simple counsel of perfection: Forsake all and you shall find all. Renounce desire and you will find peace.¹²

However, there is another way, less approved in the christian tradition, and better charted perhaps in some eastern traditions. It has found its expression in some gnostic and unofficial versions of christianity and can be noticed in Blake, in Yeats (in some moods) and in C. G. Jung. Briefly, it is a way of 'living through' one's experience, avoiding nothing, and treading the paths of one's own weakness, irrationality and folly until one's nature is purged of these things. 'The road to the palace of wisdom', wrote Blake, 'leads through the gates of excess'. He was not excusing self-indulgence, but pointing to a way of life which could be just as adequately a 'working out of one's salvation in fear and trembling' as any of the more approved ways of the spirit.

For instance, Yeats at times, far from desiring to be transported from pain and passion into the 'artifice of eternity', found the 'blood and mire'

¹⁰ *Four Quartets*.

¹¹ Nicholls, William: 'Note on Heidegger in Bultmann's Existentialist Philosophy', in *Pelican Guide to Modern Theology* (London, 1969), vol 1, pp 177-8.

¹² *The Imitation of Christ*, III, 23.

and very randomness and absurdity of life a kind of blessing. He was willing to live it all again:

... to live it all again
And yet again, if it be life to pitch
Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
A blind man, battering blind men.¹³

He meant that he was willing to live through all his follies, take the consequences of his own nature, and act out all his irrationalities, and still find life blessed:

I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot.¹⁴

He added a note on the cleansing and cathartic power of such an attitude on his own somewhat inhibited and over-introspective nature:

When such as I cast out remorse,
So great a sweetness flows into the breast.
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.¹⁵

Yeats is here pointing to a 'way' of life, maybe a spiritual way, not sufficiently charted in christian literature — a way to perfection which consists of going through experience instead of avoiding it — a way of 'go through it' rather than a way of 'don't do it'.

C. G. Jung has explored the same territory, and come to parallel conclusions. He has tended to reject traditional spiritual disciplines, as being in this day and age, and for many people, unable to contribute to the growth of the individual. He has described the life of the individual as a process of individuation — a finding out through experience, through mistakes, even through folly and egoism, of *who he is*, and where he stands under the eye of eternity, so to speak. Although Jung is so far from traditional spiritual writers in his view of the right *means* to salvation, he is very near to them in equating this quest for one's own deepest inner identity with the quest for the will of God: life being a process of *becoming* what you most deeply *are* and what you were

¹³ *Dialogue between self and soul.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

created to be. He is perhaps speaking of special cases, but he acknowledges the God-given power even of egoism in life:

If I wish to effect a cure for my patients I am forced to acknowledge the deep significance of their egoism. I should be blind indeed if I did not recognize in it the true will of God. I must even help the patient to prevail in his egoism; even if, succeeding in this, he estranges himself from other people. . . . This must be left to him, for it is his strongest and healthiest power; it is as I have said a true will of God, which sometimes drives him into complete isolation. However wretched this state may be, it also stands him in good stead, for in this way alone can he take his own measure.¹⁶

Jung's conclusion is that 'the archdemon of egoism leads us along the royal road to that ingathering which religious experience demands'.¹⁷

Although 'the way' may lead one on a journey *through* one's egoism, as Jung suggests, it need not be a selfish quest, ultimately considered. Like every other good in human existence, it can be (and inevitably is) distorted by the selfishness of our estranged state. In the last analysis, however, it cannot be a selfish purpose to find that in ourselves which alone enables us to relate at the level of truth to people and things, and without which we cannot relate properly to anything. The inward search is *not* the same as introspection. It is, to quote Archbishop Bloom, a journey not so much *into* myself as '*through* my own self in order to emerge from the deepest level of self into the place where he is, at the point where God and I meet'.¹⁸

A third way of living 'authentically' is that outlined by Heidegger, of living towards one's own death. This is to live amidst the goods and possessions of this world in the constant awareness that none of them can be of any avail when death comes — and it can come at any time. The man who lives towards his own death lives detached from things and people, and so is able to relate properly to them, without greed or exploitation. He realizes that here he has no abiding city; he is one of those 'who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away'.¹⁹

Actually all means of spirituality — either the traditional way of self-control and self-denial, or the other way of experiencing out one's own egoism — are all meant to lead to a position of non-attachment to inner fantasies and outer objects. Both ways could be

¹⁶ *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (London, 1962), pp 274-5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* ¹⁸ *School for Prayer* (London, 1970), p 20.

¹⁹ 1 Cor 5, 11. 30-31.

described as two natural phases of a single effort. 'Your essential duty and desire', says Teilhard de Chardin, 'is to be united with God. But in order to be united, you must first of all *be* — be yourself as completely as possible. And so you must develop yourself and take possession of the world in *order to be*. Once this has been accomplished, then is the time to think about renunciation'.²⁰

Reverting to Jung's point about the 'ingathering' of powers which religious experience demands, all religious writers of whatever persuasion seem to be agreed about this, whatever their differences of opinion about the means towards this end. The capacity to experience anything or anybody at all depends on the existence of an 'ingathered' experiencing personal centre, without which neither life, nor oneself, nor events, nor other people, can be experienced as meaningful. The aim is to *be* at one's own centre, to live where one lives, and not constantly to be abroad, outside or beside oneself. As Anthony Bloom writes:

What you have got to do, is to be so completely in the present that all your energies and all your being is summed up in the word 'now'. You discover with great interest that you are in the 'now'. . . . This is the situation we must learn. . . . I think we must do exercises in stopping time and in standing in the present, in this 'now' which is my present and which is also the intersection of eternity with time.

Amongst other things, he recommends the difficult exercise of 'sitting still' for short periods of set time, and refusing to be 'pulled out' by any distraction, no matter how apparently urgent.²¹

The arch-enemy of such ingathering is, of course, what has been traditionally called multiplicity — in the greed for experience and sensation, and an over-attachment to the surface world of events and one's own thoughts and fantasies. Eckhart speaks of the need to practise the presence of God amidst the multiplicity of life:

. . . a man should not allow himself to be distracted, disturbed or exhausted by multiplicity, either in the shape of internal images such as fancies or pride of the heart, or external images or whatever it may be that is present in a man. He should devote all his energies to fighting them and should have his inwardness present.²²

²⁰ Cf *Le Milieu Divin*, p 78.

²¹ See the chapter on 'Managing Time', in *School for Prayer*.

²² Eckhart: *Talks of Instruction* (London, 1963).

What Eckhart appears to be saying is that if one wants to be able to experience anything properly, then one must not be too attached to the endless carnival of outward events and inward feelings. If you want to know yourself you must live spiritually at home and mind your own business: this is a discipline and an art. He quotes St Augustine with approval:

The soul which goes forth into multiplicity is greedily pursuing poverty, all unaware that she can only avoid it by keeping herself separate and apart. . . . The more she strives to embrace, the more she suffers want. . . . Just as in a circle, however large it may be, there is a single centre upon which everything converges, which holds sway over all . . . so that if you were to go out from it in any direction everything would be lost by the very act of advancing into multiplicity . . . so the soul poured out from itself is torn asunder by a sort of universality and wasted away by real poverty or falsehood, inasmuch as it is compelled by its nature to seek the one and is prevented by multiplicity from finding it.²³

The art then is the staying at the centre of one's self and one's world:

At the still point of the turning world; neither flesh nor fleshless
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is
But neither arrest nor movement.²⁴

A difficult art in all its subtlety — the art of being still, and *not* being dissipated and dragged round by the pull of inner and outer events. The threat of fragmentation has always been present to some extent in individuals in any society, but in our western culture it seems to have assumed alarming proportions. As Paul Tillich used to point out, the medieval threat of hell has been exchanged in modern cultures for an equally ultimate threat — that of meaninglessness or loss of centre. 'The disrupting trends of man's consciousness', he wrote, 'are one of the great problems of all personal life. If a uniting centre is absent, the infinite variety of the encountered world, as well as of the inner movements of the human mind, is able to produce a complete disintegration of the personality'.²⁵

Tillich's remarks on this point are tied in with his general theory of man's predicament of estrangement — his existence in this world in a state of inevitable but hurtful dissociation from himself, from his fellows and from God, the Ground of his being. Under the conditions of

²³ *Ibid.*, p 195.

²⁴ Cf T. S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*.

²⁵ *The Dynamics of Faith* (London, 1957), p 107.

estrangement, according to Tillich, we have a fatal drive towards the condition of meaninglessness, inasmuch as we are frequently governed by our own egoism which seeks to consume all life and all experience ('concupiscence') and to inflate itself at whatever cost (*hybris*).²⁶

'Finite self', in Tillich's vocabulary, is the surface ego or 'smoke-self' (Merton). The attempt to inflate it or to over-identify with it may no longer lead to a hell of brimstone, but it can lead to an equivalent hell of meaninglessness, inasmuch as it can lead to the loss of the true self (orthographically indentified by the capital S), which underlies all the roles we play and all the fantasies we think or act out, and which is the ontological reality of our own identity. To lose sight of it, as Tillich points out, is not only to lose ourselves, but to lose a meaningful world. He speaks of the terrifying transmutation of human freedom into arbitrariness, the complete loss of relationship to persons and things, which is the result of our pursuit of our own finite or 'smoke' self.²⁷

He admits that this distortion of freedom into arbitrariness is applicable only to individuals in extreme situations, but he insists that it indicates a real danger to which all men are prone, in their estranged state.

In the face of all this, it would appear that the contemporary mode of the perennial problem of 'salvation' is precisely the problem of *identity*. Thomas Merton sums it all up in the more traditional 'language of salvation':

The true inner self must be drawn up like a jewel from the bottom of the sea, rescued from confusion, from indistinction, from immersion in the common, the nondescript, the trivial, the sordid, the evanescent.²⁸

He goes on, in prophetic tones as fits his vocation, to say the same thing as Tillich — that we must be saved from our own surface ego. He calls it our worldly self or contingent ego:

We must be saved from immersion in the sea of lies and passions which is called 'the world'. And we must be saved, above all, from that abyss of confusion and absurdity which is our own worldly self. . . . The free son of God must be saved from the conformist salve of fantasy, passion and convention. The creative and mysterious inner self must be saved from the wasteful, hedonistic and destructive ego that seeks only to cover itself with disguises.²⁹

²⁶ *Systematic Theology* (Chicago, 1957), vol 2, p 71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p 72.

²⁸ *New Seeds of Contemplation* (London, 1961), p 30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

He concludes as Tillich concludes — that the ontological threat today is of being 'lost', and that the idea of salvation still has meaning:

To be 'lost' is to be left to the arbitrariness and pretences of the contingent ego, the smoke-self that must inevitably vanish. To be saved is to return to one's own inviolate and eternal reality and to live in God.³⁰

To state what is desirable is one thing. To say how it is to be accomplished is another. What are the things which help us into life, which draw our energies together, which give inspiration and open our new dimensions and perspectives? Young and old alike continue to look for the transforming power. We have seen much more of the efforts of the younger people, whose experiments with drugs, sex, meditation and forms of communal living have attracted widespread publicity; however, I think that other generations not so young and not so newsworthy have also had their problems and their search for life and for meaning.

There is nothing new here. The search has always been for the fuller life and for the transformation of consciousness. Even the new means are not new — drugs, meditation and sex have always been mind-blowers, transformers of consciousness, and like every other do-it-yourself means of salvation have their use and their abuse, their power and their disappointing limitations.³¹ We can range them alongside other means and instruments of life — the arts and even the sacraments themselves — as potential sources of life, but open to self-centred manipulation, exploitation and illusion.

In the end all our strivings for life, by whatever means we adopt, must be 'bathed in the waters of Heaven' in order that they might be cleansed of distortion and purged of self-centredness and obsessional elements.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Auden writes sarcastically on the limitations of meditation:

Dare-devil mystics who bear the scars
Of many spiritual wars
And smoothly tell
The starving that their one salvation
Is personal regeneration
By fasting, prayer and contemplation;
Is it? Well,
Others have tried it; all delight
Sustained in that ecstatic flight
Could not console
When through exhausting hours they'd flown
From the alone to the Alone
Nothing remained but the dry as bone
Night of the soul. (Cf *A Communist to others*)

There are, however, some general ways of dealing with experience which remain valid.

1. *The experiencing out of the pains and passivities of life*

This involves more than a resigned endurance of our frailties, shocks, illnesses, bereavements and deaths. It means a positive dwelling in them (though not on them). While taking all legitimate means of avoidance, pain when it comes is to be taken into one's being, and the more centrally it pierces, the more centrally it is to be borne — not exactly cherished, but certainly taken into one's inner being. This includes all the things that diminish, shock, or impinge upon our lives, including the final impingement of death itself. All is to be looked on by the eyes of faith as an act of communion.³²

We all know how difficult such a policy is to flesh and blood, but there is no other way out of it. While we live we must have pain, and the only way to see it is as being *our* pain (our 'name' written on it so to speak). Taken this way, as Merton points out, it can be linked with our baptism into Christ's death. In its acceptance we are helped to learn the secret of our identity. The matter is fully treated by Thomas à Kempis, notably in his famous chapter on The Royal Road of the holy Cross, and also by Teilhard de Chardin.³³ There is no room for arrogance or complacency in discussing the matter of acceptance of pain. Too much pain can reduce men to physical or moral fragments, and the notion of 'acceptance' or of God's mercy in these circumstances passes into mystery. All we know is that victims have been mysteriously sustained even in times of extreme torment. The remarks above, however, apply to the normal pains of human living.

We must learn to bear time and the secret of salvation that time brings with it. Self-salvation by avoidance of pain is impossible. Salvation must come from the 'givenness' of life — a givenness which brings health and good fortune and well-being, but which also brings accident, pain, absurdity and tragedy. It is given in order that we may take our path through it, a path which is uniquely our own and which no-one can take for us. 'It is not our business', says Teilhard de Chardin, 'to withdraw from the world before our time; let us learn to orientate our being in the flux of things'.

³² In itself death is the final act of communion and the final entrance into our inmost selves. Cf *Le Milieu Divin*, pp 68-69.

³³ *Imitation*, II, 12; Cf *Le Milieu Divin*, p 51 ff.

2. *The management of time*

In our western technological civilisations we have ceased to be the masters of the dimension of time, and have become its slaves. We are ruled by the clock, the schedule, the time-plan and the need to do things within a certain time. An obsession with time means that the things we do are anxiety-ridden, frequently with an illusory urgency that if they are not done now, or very quickly, then we are going to lose something. There are indeed times and necessities for prompt action, but these are not half as frequent as we like to delude ourselves. In terms of the things that really matter (I mean love, whether of God or of man), hours, days, months are, as John Donne has said, mere 'rags of time'.

To learn to live in time, as distinct from being hurried and swept along by it, we must learn to master its tyranny. Anthony Bloom has advocated that we set aside a certain period each day when we simply sit still, and refuse to answer any demands at all — either phone calls, visits, letters, which come from outside; or the sudden impulses to do long-outstanding jobs or write delayed letters, or attend to unattended pieces of business that occur to us when we sit down for a minute's rest.

We must learn the basic truth that we are, here and now, in union with God, and that he is master of time, space and circumstance. We must rest in him at times. He will give us both power, time and circumstance to do whatever he requires of us. What he does *not* require of us, and what in fact is a kind of ungodliness (Kierkegaard), is anxiety and self-torment about the morrow, and the feeling that the world will collapse if we decide 'to put our feet up'.

If we insist in living purely in time (which means endless anxiety for the morrow) then we have ceased to live in eternity, which is the *Now*, which is God. He will give us our *daily* bread, but tomorrow is his mystery and we are not to try to live there in our fantasies and delusions. 'If we live with possibilities, we are exiles from the present which is given to us by God to be our own, homeless and displaced in a future or a past which are not ours because they are always beyond our reach. The present is our right place and we can lay hands on whatever it offers us'.³⁴

3. *To try to live in the ambience of the will of God*

Thomas Merton, Alan Watts and others make a distinction between a man of *right* intention and a man of *simple* intention. A man of right intention conducts his life and work in order to 'please' God. But the

³⁴ Cf *No Man is an Island* (London, 1960), p 193.

work and the self doing the work are somehow outside of God, and there is some implicit hope that there will be a kind of 'reward' for the successful accomplishment of a task. There is still an element of striving here. Most men of good will live in a state of 'right intention'. Sometimes it gets frayed at the edges with fatigue and irritation, but rest and prayer usually restore it. But there is a deeper way of life, where a man lives *in God* every moment. He acts, but he is utterly detached from the success or failure of his action. His energies are concentrated in the Now, which is God. He may be working for particular purposes to be realized in the future, but all he cares about is the perfection of his action *now* and its rootedness in God. To live in this sphere of 'right action' is to live *in God*, and to live in total freedom, because we are free from what Eliot calls the enchainment of past and future. 'For the end of a simple intention is to work in God and with him — to sink deep roots into the soil of his will and to grow there in whatever weather he may bring'. Such a man is of *simple* intention, and a true contemplative whatever state of life he may be in.

There are no particular methods of attaining such a desirable state of harmony with oneself and one's world. Whether we like it or not, all of us are already living and being sustained in the Now, though the illusions, fantasies, anxieties and forebodings of our over-active minds manage mainly to destroy the benediction of this reality. You cannot *grasp* the Now, because it already grasps you.

You live and move in the Now, and though you try to grasp the moment or flee from the moment until the end of time, it holds you unchangeably in its embrace. The realization comes and the possessive will surrenders itself when you are thoroughly convinced that, struggle as you may, there is no escape from the love of God.³⁵

Various methods — set times of prayer, deliberate meditation, various 'mantra' prayers for clearing the mind, yoga exercises and so on — are all perhaps helpful, but they are only methods. Moreover they can be used wrongly to *grasp* God, whereas God cannot be grasped, because he already grasps us.

It is impossible to keep such a method in mind . . . and even then it is not best. We ought not to have, or let ourselves be satisfied with, this God we have thought of, for when the thought slips the mind, that God slips with it. What we want is rather the reality of God, exalted far above any thought or creature. Then God will not vanish unless one turns away from him of one's own accord.³⁶

³⁵ Watts, Alan: *Behold the Spirit* (London, 1947), p 104.

³⁶ Cf Eckhart: *Talks of Instruction*.

Fundamentally, the whole secret is the surrender of the possessive will. And as long as we are a fallen race, our ego will always stand in our own best light and lead us into contradiction, trouble and anxiety. However, so long as we make the long-term choice, we may, *during the course of a lifetime*, come to live in the light of the eternal Now, and out of the darkness of our ego-bound, time-bound, anxiety-ridden, fantasy-dominated existence.

. . . the surrender of the possessive will cuts at the very root of evil. Living to so great a degree in the present we are delivered from anxiety for the morrow. . . . Just how all this happens cannot be said and if it could be, there would be no point in saying it since none of these effects can be produced by mimicry. We have to discover first our total dependence on and union with God, and then 'all these things will be added unto you'.³⁷

All of which returns to the initial theme that the work of a lifetime is to heal the eye of our heart whereby we may find God, and also thereby our own deepest identity.

. . . let me clearly realize first of all that what God wants of me is myself. That means to say that his will for me points to one thing: the realization, the discovery and the fulfilment of my self, my true self in Christ. . . . When Jesus said 'he that would save his life will lose it, and he that would lose his life for my sake will find it', he was teaching us the great truth that God's will for us is, before all else, that we should find ourselves, find our true life, or, as the Vulgate text has it, 'find our souls'.³⁸

³⁷ Cf *Behold the Spirit*, p 108.

³⁸ Cf *No Man is an Island*, p 55.