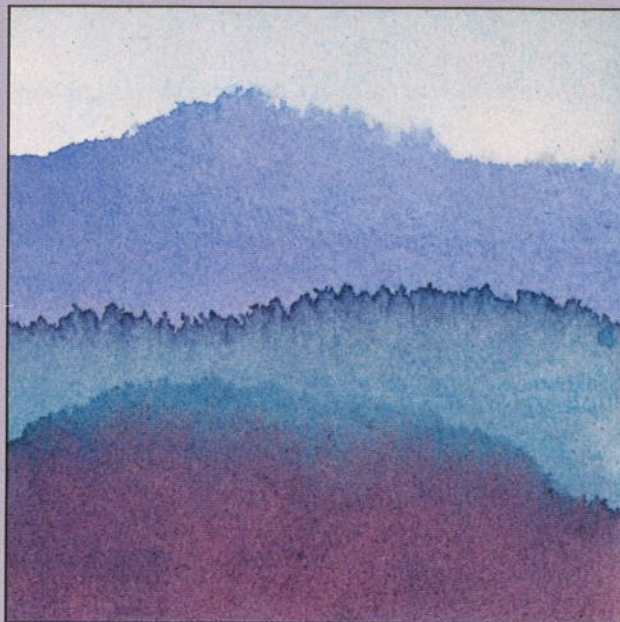


# *Speaking of Silence*



Christians and Buddhists  
on the Contemplative Way

Edited by SUSAN WALKER



tarting in 1981 Christians and Buddhists have been meeting informally in Boulder, Colorado to share their experiences of the spiritual way. Several dozen spiritual teachers, both men and women, representing many varieties of Buddhism and Christianity, have explored together the value of prayer and contemplation, attitudes toward God and emptiness, and practical topics such as silence, virtue, compassion, sin, suffering, the self and the ego.



his book assembles the most fruitful exchanges sponsored by the Naropa Institute in Boulder. It combines talks, conversations, poetry and rituals shared by participants at the annual meetings. What emerges from these pages is a sense of shared vision on the most profound level, transcending all cultural and historical differences. It will speak to Christians, Buddhists and all people who feel drawn in the course of their lives to encounter the transcendent.



Paulist Press  
0-8091-2880-2

\$12.95

Cover Design: Barbara Bash

# *Speaking of Silence*

Christians and Buddhists  
on the Contemplative Way

Edited by SUSAN WALKER



---

PAULIST PRESS • NEW YORK • MAHWAH

Contributors

Tenshin Anderson  
Sister Benedetta  
Tessa Bielecki  
Lodrö Dorje  
Jack Engler  
Joseph Goldstein  
Thomas Hopko  
Thomas Keating  
The Dalai Lama  
Judith Lief  
William McNamara  
Reginald Ray  
Eido Shimano  
David Steindl-Rast  
Tai Situpa  
George Timko  
Chögyam Trungpa  
John Yungblut

Copyright © 1987  
by Naropa Institute

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the Publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Speaking of silence.

Papers originally presented at Naropa Institute conferences.

Bibliography: p. 319

1. Spiritual life—Comparative studies—Congresses.
2. Contemplation—Comparative studies—Congresses.
3. Christianity and other religions—Buddhism—Congresses.
4. Buddhism—Relations—Christianity—Congresses.

I. Walker, Susan. II. Naropa Institute.

BL624.S658 1987 248.3'4 87-9207

ISBN 0-8091-2880-2 (pbk.)

Published by Paulist Press  
997 Macarthur Boulevard  
Mahwah, New Jersey 07430

Printed and bound in the  
United States of America

Father Merton's visit to Southeast Asia took place when I was in Calcutta....I had the feeling that I was meeting an old friend, a genuine friend. In fact, we planned to work on a book containing selections from the sacred writings of Christianity and Buddhism. We planned to meet either in Great Britain or in North America. He was the first genuine person I met from the West. After meeting Thomas Merton, I visited several monasteries in Great Britain, and at some of them I was asked to give talks on meditation, which I did....I was very impressed and moved by the contemplative aspect of Christianity, and by the monasteries themselves. Their lifestyle and the way they conducted themselves convinced me that the only way to join the Christian tradition and the Buddhist tradition together is by means of bringing together Christian contemplative practice with Buddhist meditative practice.

CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA

from an address to the Naropa  
Institute Conference on Christian  
and Buddhist Meditation,  
August 9, 1983

Chögyam Trungpa is a completely marvelous person. Young, natural, without front or artifice, deep, awake, wise. I am sure we will be seeing a lot more of each other....I've had the idea of editing a collection of pieces by various Buddhists on meditation etc., with an introduction of my own....I must talk to Chögyam Trungpa about this today.

THOMAS MERTON

from entries dated  
October 20 and 22, 1968  
in *The Asian Journal*

## Standing on Holy Ground

David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.

None of us would have any interest in learning about any form of spirituality if we hadn't had some experience of wonderment and of ultimate belonging in the world. Perhaps this experience was just fleeting. If you tried to communicate it, you might find yourself saying something like, "For a moment I lost myself. I was listening to music, and I just lost myself." In the *Four Quartets*, T. S. Eliot speaks of being "lost in a shaft of sunlight." But at the same time—and this is the paradox—you could say that at those moments when you lost yourself, you were also more truly yourself than at any other time. At the moment when you lose your little self, you find your true self, your full self. In his autobiography, *To Leave Before Dawn*, Julian Green recalls such a moment from his adolescence:

I was lying on my back when, all of a sudden, a feeling of indescribable happiness swept over my whole being. It seemed as though the threats that weighed on the world no longer existed, that all sadness had suddenly ended, and that, in a deep and complete security, everything blossomed into joy. . . . I did not think of God, I thought of nothing, to speak truthfully, I did not think, I forgot who I was.<sup>2</sup>

Self-forgetfulness, which brings us to the very center of our being, is associated with the Biblical concept of heart. The heart is where we are fully alive, fully aware, fully ourselves, and at the same time it is where we are fully united with all others and with God. As Christ says in the New Testament, "He who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39). The heart is the place where the human and the divine are simply one. For most of us this type of experience is elusive, yet it is the only means we have of touching who we really are, and of finding our true anchorage in life. So naturally the desire springs up to live that way always: to always be in touch with the very center of one's being. That is the desire underlying every spiritual path. It is not to say that we should try to cling to those experiences that are fleeting; obviously that would be futile. But

the question becomes, how can we put ourselves into a frame of mind that will lead us to live life in its fullness? Out of that question every path springs, and in the case of the Benedictine path, it was in response to that question that Saint Benedict wrote a Rule of life. "Rule" is not used here in this sense of rules and regulations. The word *rule* comes from the Greek term *canon*, which originally meant "trellis." The Rule of Saint Benedict is a trellis which supports a life of mindfulness, a life lived in fullness.

The Rule was written in the sixth century. At that time, Christian monasticism was only three hundred years old, but it had already become rather decadent; and so Saint Benedict introduced a set of guidelines in the form of a little book, a Rule for how to conduct monastic life. By the high Middle Ages, most of the monasteries in the West followed his Rule.

In The Rule of Saint Benedict is a passage that says we should always be on guard, living in a state of continual suspense with death always before our eyes.<sup>3</sup> Awareness of death is a key point in understanding the Benedictine path. Now, it may seem somewhat macabre to deliberately reflect on death, but it is in no way meant to be so; on the contrary, the remembrance of death is what can make us more and more alive. In this passage, the word "suspense" suggests something suspended, as if a sword were hanging on a very thin thread over our heads. That image should wake us up, not scare us; it is exactly the opposite of fear. The awareness of death has nothing to do with fear, except perhaps that it is a way of overcoming it. Death is the horizon of who we are, against which each experience is silhouetted. It is like writing on a blackboard with white chalk. If we aren't aware of that horizon, we can never really see or appreciate whatever is standing in the foreground. When we are aware, we naturally feel a sense of wonderment that things are as they are. I recently spent some time at Tassajara Monastery where I met a little three-and-a-half-year-old philosopher. She was walking around with the air of someone who had just made an important discovery, pointing to everything she saw, and saying, "What if it were different?" It is such a basic question. And of course the greatest difference would be, what if it wasn't here at all? When we apply that question to ourselves, we understand that everything is totally gratuitous. To feel this gratuity against the background of the possibility of not being here at all is the beginning of the spiritual path. When I read The Rule of Saint Benedict for the first time, the passage about death struck a deep and familiar chord in me, and I

thought, "Oh yes, that is what I have always wanted in my life: I want to live in such a way that I can stand up to that challenge." So it has a special importance for me, personally. But the awareness of death also holds its own place in the monastic tradition in general. Many sundials in the old monasteries bear the inscription *memento mori*: remember that you will die. But there are also some that say *memento vivere*: remember to live. And there is really no difference between these two admonitions.

If you have ever visited a monastery of any tradition, you have seen that it is something like a laboratory, a controlled environment in which everything is geared toward the pursuit of mindfulness. The theological superstructure may vary, but the cultivation of mindfulness is always the common element. In a Benedictine monastery, the Rule is what shapes time and place. Everything is designed and arranged in order to help you be present, to be where you are.

It seems that people are often disappointed when they first come to live in a monastery. Everyone expects to be taught some kind of spirituality, but instead they are taught that when you take off your shoes, you should put them parallel to each other, and not pigeon-toed. You should close doors behind you and learn the proper way to walk and to eat. At first novices might think, "All this must be for beginners. I will wait until the real thing comes along." But that is the real thing. Those little acts all help to make us mindful. Everything is arranged in a particular way, so that we will be present where we are. In the Benedictine monastery this principle is also expressed by the arrangement of buildings, which has been remarkably stable through the centuries. All buildings point to a center, and in that center stands the church. In the case of the Monastery of Mount Savior, where I live, the church is an octagonal building, and at the very center of that is the altar.

When you first come to the monastery, you think that there are many activities in the course of a day: you work, you study, you sleep, you eat. And all these different activities are in different places. You also go to church more frequently than you used to and stand around the altar with the others and read or chant. Then after a while your picture changes, and you think of yourself standing with the others around the altar, occasionally going out to do something or other because it needs to be done. But basically you are always standing there, by the altar. After awhile comes a third phase, when you see yourself always at the center, and the

altar is no longer that important: it is just a symbol. When you stand at the kitchen stove, that is the center, that is the altar. And when you lie on your bed, then your bed becomes the altar. You are always standing on holy ground. In the well-known Biblical passage, Moses sees the burning bush, and the presence of God calls out to him, "Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exod. 3:5). The rabbis interpret this not so much as a warning to Moses that he should take off his shoes because that particular ground is holy, but rather that the shoes are made out of the skin of animals, and represent something dead or foreign between our feet and the ground on which we stand. Wherever we take off our shoes, we will realize that we have been standing on holy ground.

All of monastic life is an effort to take off our shoes. Of course, it is not necessary to live in a monastery in order to live this life. In fact, there are many lay people who are vastly more alive than monks. Nevertheless, the monastic environment is explicitly geared, through the arrangement of space and time, toward helping us become more alive. All the bells, gongs, and drums in a monastery are there to remind us: this is the moment, this is the moment. Saint Benedict says that at the very first sound of a bell a monk should drop everything and go toward whatever it is the time to be doing. He shouldn't even stop to dot his "i's" if he is in the middle of writing a letter, but he should just get up and go. In the *Four Quartets*, T. S. Eliot calls this "time, not our time." To act when it is time is different from doing something when we feel like it. A task for all of us is to attune ourselves to time which is not *our* time. Time is not something that we can hang on to; it is a gift we receive moment by moment. Eliot introduces here the image of the Angelus bell. This bell was traditionally rung in monasteries at sunrise, at noon, and at sunset, to indicate that the monks were about to meet for prayer. It was rung loudly enough so that people in the houses and villages surrounding the monastery could also hear it. Then they would join the monks in prayer. You may have noticed that those are special times even for the birds and for the monkeys who climb up into the trees. They start singing and yelling as the sun rises and also when it sets. And then at high noon all of creation is quiet. It is something like a miniature eclipse. Everything becomes absolutely still and quiet. These times of the day, at least, are marked out in every tradition as special moments of mindfulness: sunrise, high noon,

and sunset. They are unrepeatable, unique moments. The sun is not going to set twice; you cannot bring it back. The show won't be repeated because you were not ready for it.

In a Benedictine monastery, time and place are ordered in a way that helps us to be alert, mindful, and always present. Present to what? Present to that word which comes out of the silence. In order to bring this somewhat abstract-sounding statement into our own experience, we have to learn to listen. That is one of the great tasks in monastic life in general, and in particular, I would say, in the mindfulness discipline of Benedictine spirituality. We have to learn to listen. And that means, of course, not only to listen to scriptures or to what our abbot tells us, but to listen unconditionally, always, in every situation, with our hearts.

In the First Book of Kings the prophet Elijah went to the mountain of God and stood there, hoping that God's presence would be renewed and would become available to him. After some time a great storm arose, but God was not in the storm. Then a terrible earthquake shook the land, but God was not in the earthquake. Next a burning fire passed by Elijah, but God was not in the fire. And finally, there was a still, small voice of silence. And when Elijah heard this he hid his face, because he knew he was in the presence of God.

Obedience, as it is practiced in the Christian tradition, means learning to tune in and to listen to God's word; in fact *obaudire* means "to listen thoroughly." The Biblical expression is, "to listen with circumcised ears." On the first pages of Genesis, God says: "Let there be light." And there was light. He says, "Let there be a firmament." And there was a firmament. And so on, with all the elements of the world. Everything we come across is a word of God. And not only every *thing* but every person and every situation is another spelling-out the eternal word of God which speaks to us.

When we first make an effort to listen, we will probably become aware of a lot of background static which is preventing us from hearing. It is just like the noise we hear on a little transistor radio when we try to tune in to a distant station: a nearby radio station is making so much noise that all we hear is a lot of static. For us, the nearby station is the loud voice of our selfish desires, hopes, fears: our selfishness in other words. Because ego makes so much noise, we need a way to get rid of its static, and the way we do that is by handing over our self-will to someone else. We give over our self-will to someone in whom we trust, and we vow to do

whatever that person tells us to do. This takes place within a special set of circumstances, and with particular rules to the game. It is somewhat like putting an arm that has been injured into a sling. The goal, of course, is not to have that arm in a sling for the rest of one's life: we want to eventually take the arm out and use it again. In the same way, monastic obedience is not the goal *in se*. Otherwise at the end of a life of obedience we would be marionettes, mindlessly following someone else's instructions. The real goal is to learn how to tune in to God's word, which tells us what we need to do in any given situation. The goal of obedience is to find meaning in life. When we find something totally meaningless, we say that it is absurd. This is interesting linguistically, because the Latin root *absurdus* means "out of tune." The meaning we seek is not of anything in particular, but meaning which is ultimate, meaning within which we can rest. The heart is restless until it finds that within which it can rest.<sup>4</sup> The heart, the innermost center of one's being, is like a needle on a compass. It is always restless until it is perfectly oriented toward magnetic north, which is the direction we call God. Our senses are involved in this quest for meaning. In the context of Christian spirituality, the word is made flesh because God speaks to us through our senses. For most of us, our senses are terribly neglected. For example, there are many people for whom there exist only two smells: good and bad. What an impoverished mentality that is! God didn't need to bother creating so many different smells if all we are capable of appreciating is good or bad. Actually, there are no bad smells at all: there are only good smells that happen to be in the wrong places!

Take a moment to imagine a fresh spring day. What smells come to mind? Perhaps you think of wet pavement, or grass, or the smell of a certain place you like to go. Write these down for yourself, and then make a similar list for each of the other seasons. Soon you will become aware of all the tremendous varieties and possibilities there are. And later, some time when you are a little depressed or bored, you can look through your list again, and read it as a litany of praise to what life has given you in the past. Appreciation of that richness is an important part of spirituality in Benedictine life, because we know, in our heart of hearts, that God speaks to us through everything. And in the Christian context, he has only one message, only one thing to say, which is, "I love you." It is an inexhaustible message, which therefore has to be spelled out forever and ever. Think of lovers. They have nothing else to say except, "I love you." Yet,

they never tire of hearing it from each other. We never say, "Well, I told you that twenty-five years ago, dear. Do you really want to hear it again?" We never come to the end of our spiritual life, because we never finish experiencing all the many different ways in which God says, "I love you." Every time we taste or hear or feel something new, we discover a different way, which is untranslatable in any other experience or language. When we hear thunder, that is something unique. And when we hear rain, God is speaking in an entirely different language. If we have never experienced it, we just don't know it. There is no other way but to listen to the rain. Life is just too short to learn all these many languages. But it is never too late to begin opening ourselves and tuning in.

I would like to conclude with a little key word which ties together all these many elements of Benedictine life. It is a master key which simplifies things enormously. All that I have been discussing so far is contained within the word *gratefulness*. "Grate-fulness" has two parts. First of all, there is the *gratuitousness* of everything there is. It is the sense of wonderment that things exist at all. When we cultivate gratefulness, we cultivate wonderment. Everything is gratuitous. We haven't made it. We haven't earned it, even if we have worked hard. Everything is a gift. And the second aspect of gratefulness is the *fullness* of our response. It is a response from the heart, because only in our heart of hearts are we fully present, fully ourselves, and fully in touch with God, who is closer to us than we are to ourselves. We might think that gratitude is something passive: to be grateful, you just say "thanks." But that is not the idea here. Other languages express it more powerfully. In Latin, it is *gratias agere*, which means "to give thanks," "to act gratefully."

Within every situation, the gift of gifts is opportunity. We are grateful not for the situation itself, but for the fact that we have been given the opportunity to do something in response: to speak out, to act, or to suffer. To suffer is always the last thing we can do, and we always have the opportunity to do it willingly. If we suffer *with* the grain, rather than just being pulled along against the grain, then we experience the passion of suffering, which is also a response to the fullness of each moment.

In the very center of Catholic spirituality, we find the eucharist, the Lord's Supper. "Eucharist" means thanksgiving. The sacramental celebration of thanksgiving extends into every part of daily life. The eucharist is a ritual which symbolizes the experience of God's life within us. In Christian theology, and above all in monastic theology, God is Giver.

Therefore God can be called Father, Mother, Life-Giver, Giver of all Things. Everything that comes to us is a gift from the Ultimate Giver, whom the Bible calls God. The ultimate gift is the Son, our true, God-given self. God is manifest now, the unmanifest is made manifest. The word comes out of the silence, and the Son gives himself back to the Father in thanksgiving. But the spirit of thanksgiving is God's own Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Thus through thanksgiving we can enter the very life of God, who is the very life of our lives. Through gratefulness, we enter into that prayer of thanksgiving in which the Son continuously gives thanks to the Father in the Spirit. That is the essence of prayer. Prayer itself is God's life within us, God's great dance. When we allow that life to come to ever greater fullness, we become more and more alive, and we begin to live the life of prayer. It is no longer prayer *within* one's life, but a life that is *itself* prayer. That is ultimately the aim of Benedictine monasticism.

## The Temptations of Antony

Thomas Keating O.C.S.O.

Christian monastic life was first propagated in Egypt, during the decline of the Age of Martyrdom, which finally ended with the Edict of Milan in 312. According to *The Life of Antony*, written by Saint Athanasius in the mid-fourth century, the total dedication expressed by the ideal of martyrdom could also be expressed through the monastic lifestyle, which Antony called a "martyrdom of conscience." This message inspired thousands of people, who withdrew to the Egyptian and Syrian deserts in imitation of Antony. In the course of the following two hundred years, monks developed a monastic wisdom out of their experience of the desert. What they learned and practiced was then distilled, through the genius of Benedict of Nursia, into a Rule of life which has survived to this day. Monastic centers gradually spread throughout Europe, becoming a powerful civilizing influence during the Dark Ages. By the eleventh century, they had developed an outstanding humanistic culture and were known for their architectural achievements, elaborate ritual, Gregorian chant, and the art of copying and illuminating manuscripts. But the mon-

been a serious problem for Christians in recent centuries. The Protestant Reformation took place at a time when the contemplative tradition had been lost even in monastic circles. Hence the reformers did not have the contemplative tradition to take with them. It is fortunate for us as Christians that the East has preserved its mystical tradition and has even had a renewal of it during the last century. I personally feel that such a renewal is now necessary in the Christian churches.

## Living Fire

David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B.  
George Timko  
Joseph Goldstein

**BROTHER DAVID:** My greatest concern in these discussions is that from the very beginning we all agree that it is experience that matters. Our discussions will only have meaning if they come out of experience and then return to experience. I am not saying that we should see tradition as something opposed to or totally separate from personal experience. In fact, it is my contention that religious awareness inevitably leads to religion, even if it is one's own private religion. This is because the human mind always responds to such an experience in these three ways: first, intellect inevitably interprets it, and that leads to doctrine. Secondly, the will draws consequences from such an experience, and that leads to morality. And thirdly, we spontaneously celebrate our religious awareness through ritual. Wherever we find religious tradition, we find these three elements: doctrine, morality, and ritual. An image I like to use is that of a volcano. Religious experience is like an eruption of living fire. The lava flows down the side of the mountain until it cools, developing a hard rock-like crust. This is also what happens when experience is replaced with a commentary on the experience. As the crust becomes thicker, you have not only

commentaries on the experience, but commentaries on the commentaries, and finally, commentaries on the commentaries of the commentaries. Everything becomes hardened. Doctrine becomes dogmatism; morality becomes legalism; and ritual becomes conditioned action which is empty of meaning. Our great challenge and responsibility is to continually break through this hard crust of religion. Again and again, we need to let the lava, the living fire, flow out.

FATHER TIMKO: I would like to question what we mean by "religious" experience here. Not every experience is valid for establishing a religion. There are individuals who claim to have heard God telling them to perform immoral acts, or to kill people. Certainly these are not examples of "religious" experience. There are fanatic religious groups which have based their philosophy on some kind of alleged communion with God, but which is really no more than emotional experience. The Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church say that we must be wary of all empirical experiences of the senses and emotions, because the divine can never be known through such experiences, and because they can lead us to delusion. They can lead us astray and trap us, so that we will never be able to truly transcend ourselves and be touched by the Mystery beyond ourselves. How do we avoid that trap? Very simply, the Fathers say we must begin with self-knowledge, which enables us to mentally perceive the Deity as the Wholly Other. We must watch ourselves and know ourselves so that we may discern between what is of ourselves and what is of God. Otherwise, based on what we believe to be genuine religious experience, we could become self-stylized gurus leading others to our deluded version of the truth.

BROTHER DAVID: I would of course also make a distinction between genuine religious experience, to which I was previously referring, and fake religious experience. Under peer pressure, it is particularly easy to get into faking a religious experience. Naturally you would feel left out if everyone else had it and you didn't. But if that is what we are talking about, then we are

already on the wrong ground, and this whole discussion can have no basis. I would just like to say that I would tend to give the benefit of the doubt to those people who have the kind of pentecostal experience to which I think you were referring. I do not see any reason why we should not accept such experiences themselves as genuine. But what often happens is that the interpretation of the experience follows too quickly and is therefore too limited. The experience has been set up in such a way that it is immediately channeled into a very specific conceptual framework.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: I would say that in general what is important is not so much what the experience is, but how we are relating to it. The entire path of meditative practice is one of learning a proper relationship to experience. Focusing or fixating on any particular experience could actually be an obstacle on one's path. In fact, one of the great values of following a genuine tradition is that it will steer us away from this potential trap.

## Accumulated Wisdom

Thomas Keating O.C.S.O.

The world religions claim to lead to the source of all that is, which is called such various names as God, Allah, Brahman, the Absolute, and the Great Spirit. Now, in the eyes of many, the religions of the West are failing to provide a way to that source. In addition, the Western value system has brought the superpowers to the point where they are threatening to destroy the entire human race. Rightly or wrongly, many people, both in the West and in the East, look upon the Christian religion as being responsible for this dilemma—a conclusion that creates reservations in the minds of persons who otherwise might have sought the Ultimate Mystery through the Christian faith. At the same time, many Westerners find it difficult to identify with the Eastern religions, simply because of the cultural distance.

Those seekers who end up abandoning all traditional religions are left with a serious question: Is it possible to find unity with the Ultimate Mystery without drawing on the accumulated wisdom of one of the world religions? Without the experience and encouragement of a community rooted in a long tradition of spiritual discipline, how can one avoid needless mistakes and resist the back-sliding of human weakness? It is my hope that a renewal of the world religions and a restatement of their spiritual traditions might enable disillusioned seekers to return to the religion of their youth, so that we could then join together in order to rediscover and cultivate the spiritual practices which will revitalize our respective religions.

## Tensions of Change

John Yungblut  
Judith Lief  
Reginald Ray  
Loppön Lodrö Dorje

Thomas Hopko  
David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.  
Eido Tai Shimano Roshi

JOHN YUNGBLUT: I say this with fear and trembling, because I don't wish to appear out of harmony with my sisters and brothers here, but I do feel it is important to express my concern that the idol in our midst that seems to be crying out to be slain is unchallenged tradition.

One's religion is the last idol, in some sense. I represent the youngest tradition here, in that Quakerism is only 350 years old and is still in its adolescence. But at the time of its founding, George Fox said that we must slay two idols: the Anglican liturgy and the Puritan theology, with its emphasis on depravity. The Quaker tradition has no liturgy except for the handclasp and the silence. Paradoxically, Fox felt that by moving away from the church of his time, he was picking up the original, true tradition of the early church. There really wasn't much of a liturgy in the primitive church. Friends are now divided in some respects, between those who want to keep

religions are  
 the Ultimate  
 of the world  
 community  
 avoid need-  
 it is my hope  
 for spiritual  
 religion of  
 discover and  
 effective reli-

B.  
 i

use I  
 nd  
 ny  
 ing out to

resent  
 350  
 of its  
 the  
 phasis on  
 for the  
 by  
 ng up  
 eally  
 ds are  
 to keep

the practice as it was in seventeenth-century Quakerism, and those who feel that the more relevant tradition is to follow Fox's inclination to be open to the spirit wherever it leads.

From an evolutionary point of view, there is always a certain danger in holding fast to a tradition. The law of evolution is "assimilate or perish," and it seems to me that ideas and doctrines are like living creatures. If they do not adapt creatively to the changing environment, they become extinct. So I think we must recognize the need for traditions to evolve and change as well as to remain constant. I could quote here some pertinent lines from the hymn "Once to Every Man and Nation Comes the Moment to Decide," by James Russell Lowell:

New occasions teach new duties.  
 Time makes ancient good uncouth.  
 They must upward then and onward,  
 Who would keep abreast of truth.

It is not merely ancient *custom* that time erodes, but ancient *good*. What was helpful and good at one time may need revision at a later time, when seen in new perspectives.

JUDY LIEF: John, I think what you say speaks to the difference between living tradition and dead tradition. There is tradition that awakens, and there is tradition that has no real purpose beyond self-perpetuation. Obviously, the question is, what determines the difference?

JOHN YUNGBLUT: From time to time all traditions fail or seem inadequate. These are the times, to borrow a phrase from Bernstein's Mass, "When my spirit falters on decaying altars, And my illusions fail." A new leader then emerges in order to reawaken the living quality of the original spirit and to charismatically convey that to others. A period of trial and error and an adjustment, according to the new revelation, then follows.

BROTHER DAVID: I'm wondering what change a Quaker might initiate that would require you to say to him, "Well, this may be your own personal view of the needs of the future, but it has nothing to do with the heritage and development of the Society of Friends." In any impulse toward reform, what would have to be retained so that you would still feel that continuity with the past had been maintained? Is that even a relevant question for you?

JOHN YUNGBLUT: I think there are two central elements of Quakerism that must remain constant in order to protect the tradition's wellsprings of vitality. These are the Meeting for Worship, that is, some form of waiting upon the Lord in silence with the gathered company, on the one hand, and the testimonies that express concern for world peace on the other hand.

In general, I feel the secret is to remain rooted and grounded in the past, with a clear sense of continuity, while being open to the future and ready to evolve. For many Christians, the Biblical injunctions, as they have been traditionally interpreted, no longer speak with authority. From my own perspective, what does speak with authority are values that are now coming out of the process of evolution itself. As Thomas Berry, a student of Teilhard de Chardin, points out, humanity is "rooted in the spirituality of the earth." Because of this, a new ethic can be worked out as long as there is a willingness to be open to guidance. For example, many passages in the Bible condemn homosexuality. Do we really want to stay with that judgement or are we prepared to re-examine the tradition in the light of new understandings gained through the evolution of depth psychology?

BROTHER DAVID: If I understand you correctly, what you are proposing is not really so different from what we all could agree with, except perhaps for your particular stress on openness toward the future. It certainly seems that we share the feeling that it is important to be rooted in tradition, which, I would add, is very different from being *stuck* in tradition.

When spring comes, you can always tell the difference between a branch that has been stuck in the ground and one that is actually rooted. Only the rooted branch will bring forth new leaves. These will be similar to last year's leaves, but they will also be new.

JOHN YUNGBLUT: Yes. In terms of doctrine, there is one Quaker dogma, and only one, and that is the conviction that God is in everyone. To me, this assertion calls for radical re-visioning, re-imagining, and re-imagining of the entire myth of Christ. I believe there should be an opening toward this new perspective, which will also require certain changes and a readiness within the entire Christian tradition to grow and develop.

REGGIE RAY: John, I am intrigued by the term "ethical mysticism," which I understood from your earlier presentation to be an expression of the most central aspects of your tradition. I gather that the ethical aspect of ethical mysticism would involve relating to the rest of the world, and the mystical aspect would be the silence. Interestingly, in Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism there is a similar two-sided doctrine: it is said that the practitioner must join upaya and prajna. Upaya is skillful and helpful action in the world, and prajna is the wisdom inherent in unconditioned silence. Both are necessary, and in fact one implies the other. Perhaps we could even generalize by saying that these two must be upheld in some form by any tradition; otherwise the tradition has lost its foundation. Certainly this would be true of Buddhism.

JOHN YUNGBLUT: I think that is a very good way of expressing what I see to be the deepest bond between Buddhism and Quakerism. From what I have studied, Buddhism is also a life-affirming, ethical mysticism, and I accept what you are saying as an accurate comparison.

FATHER HOPKO: I have noticed that, when discussing doctrinal issues, Buddhists sometimes refer to the words of the Buddha

as being authoritative. Would the Buddhists say that the Buddha is an important factor in ensuring continuity in Buddhism?

LODRÖ DORJE: There are different interpretations of the Buddha. It seems to me that there are three avenues through which any tradition is carried on. One is the formal aspect, such as the scriptures, the liturgy, the ethical code, and so on; second is the lineage of teachers, such as the gurus of the various Buddhist lineages; and third is the spiritual experience itself. All three could be important reference points for discussing continuity. When we emphasize the scriptural tradition, Shakyamuni Buddha is primarily revered as the one who taught the basic doctrine, which was later written down in the form of sutras. From the point of view of the personal relationship with a teacher, the lineage transmission is traced from one's own guru back through a succession of gurus and disciples to Shakyamuni Buddha himself. In that case it is acknowledged that the mind of the teacher is the mind of a buddha, and the role of the historical Buddha isn't as central. And from the point of view of personal realization, the notion of universal buddha-nature plays an important role. In that case, the buddha is a reminder or symbol of each person's potential enlightenment.

REGGIE RAY: It is interesting that in the early Buddhist tradition, the primary concern was the scriptural transmission of the Buddha's words. Around 100 B.C., certain people began to express the feeling that the rigidity of continuing to hold to the literal word would hurt the tradition. Some of these people claimed to have experienced the mind of buddha, and they began to reassert that the Buddha was an embodiment of enlightenment as well as a historical human being. Enlightenment itself has no history; it has no time or place. These people began to write the Mahayana sutras, which were based on their own direct experience of enlightenment. The Vajrayana tradition then evolved out of the Mahayana through a similar process. So there has been an interesting play,

historically, between direct personal experience and the textual tradition as it is traced back to Shakyamuni Buddha. Perhaps I should just emphasize, though, that each new contribution or direction has been initiated by someone already thoroughly trained in the existing tradition. There is the sense that each new school includes the previous teachings and then goes further in a particular direction.

JOHN YUNGBLUT: What I'm hearing from the Buddhists, and what I think also exists in the Catholic tradition, is an unnecessary preoccupation with comprehensiveness, with not wanting to lose anything. The Reformation traditions, on the other hand, are concerned with getting down to the essentials. Because the emphasis is on returning to original Christianity, it is not possible to embrace large quantities of accretion. This makes it possible to cut through concerns with apostolic succession, canonical issues, and the various interpretations of texts. The Quaker tradition states that the mystical experience in silence and the social commitment to persons provide a sufficient balance for ensuring continuity with the mind of Christ. Ministry arises through the spirit and the community, by consensus. From what I understand you to say, Reggie, everyone who has made a great and evolving contribution in the Buddhist tradition did so on the basis of many years of study in the handed-on tradition. However, the Reformation traditions were willing to cut away from the existing structure. So I personally see that as a significant distinction.

REGGIE RAY: Wasn't George Fox a trained Christian?

JOHN YUNGBLUT: He studied the Bible, but he didn't have a formal theological education. I should mention one other point here. Much has been said at this conference about the importance of the teacher. In the Quaker tradition, Christ is the teacher, and Christ is really synonymous with the inner light that one is attentive to. So the Friends' Meeting for Worship in silence is to hear Christ the teacher. He is the only true teacher in this sense.

REGGIE RAY: Did Fox have disciples?

JOHN YUNGBLUT: He wouldn't have called them "disciples," because he strongly believed in the total equality of all Friends, both men and women. He would have just called them "Friends," a term that came from John's gospel: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you Friends" (John 15:15). The name "Quakers" arose in derision, to some extent, because the Friends would quake at meetings. Fox had a fantastic confidence that the community would somehow take care of itself, so that he didn't have to set up a hierarchy. Isn't that analogous to the community the Buddha left behind?

REGGIE RAY: Yes, except that in the early Buddhist community there were certain disciples who were given specific transmissions, or who were taught in one particular area or another, and these disciples then became focal points for the community. However, there wasn't any one person in charge, so in that sense it is a true comparison. I can't help wondering, though, whether some spontaneous hierarchy doesn't tend to evolve among the Friends, in the form of spiritual guidance of some kind.

JOHN YUNGBLUT: At our monthly meetings for business, we always reach for consensus. However, you are quite right that there are what we call "weighty" Friends who act as spiritual guides. But it all develops somewhat informally. They aren't appointed or even acknowledged necessarily. Friends find their teachers, though they don't have to bear that title.

BROTHER DAVID: I know that Eido Roshi, through his involvement with the transplanting of Zen Buddhism from Japan to America, has been confronted with the important question of how to balance change and continuity, and I would like to ask him to say something about his experiences.

EIDO ROSHI: Unlike Christianity, Buddhism is just now moving into this country. Zen Buddhism has its historical roots in both

China and Japan. If we were so stubborn as to just introduce traditional Japanese Zen Buddhism into an environment where the language is different and the culture is different, it wouldn't work. At the same time, if we become too quickly Americanized, we will lose the original taste of the tradition. How much we should Americanize and how much we should stick to the original tradition is a very big question. I am a stubborn person. That is my personal way. I don't know the Western culture very well, but I am willing to speak English. I am willing to shake hands, and I am willing to do something with the American people. But with regards to Zen practice, I feel, at least during my generation and maybe for one more generation as well, it is very important to have a deep respect for the original tradition. When we import the seed of an eggplant from Japan, that seed is very small. But when it is planted in this country, the eggplant becomes large, like this (demonstrates size). In my generation we need to cultivate the ground and to bring the original seed from East to West. Then the dharma will take care of itself. This is the way I feel.

**BROTHER DAVID:** In your experience, what are some of the difficulties that American students, in comparison with Japanese students, encounter in Zen practice?

**EIDO ROSHI:** In the Zen tradition, sitting is the most important thing. At least up until ten years ago, most Americans have been used to sitting on a couch or a chair. But sitting on a chair and sitting on a meditation cushion are two completely different things. In this case, even though it was difficult, the tradition had to be brought in as it was, without compromising and without Americanizing. But so many people are now sitting beautifully, comfortably on meditation cushions. Another difficulty has been chanting. If we chant the original Chinese or Japanese, of course the students ask me what everything means. But when we chant, whether it makes sense or not is a secondary matter, because it is mystical sound. The chanting is the meaning, though not intellectual meaning. That is difficult for most people, because they want to know the meaning.

REGGIE RAY: Brother David, where is the dimension of innovation and growth in the Benedictine tradition, and where has it been important to faithfully retain the traditional forms?

BROTHER DAVID: The Benedictine tradition is now 1500 years old. It was originally founded as a reform of the monasticism that had by then become decadent. In the history of the Benedictine tradition there have been repeated alternations between periods of decline and renewal. Each reform has always been characterized by a return to the Rule of Saint Benedict. That is the only element which ties all the different branches of Benedictines together. The Rule itself clearly states that all newcomers should be shown this book in a ceremonial way before they are admitted, and they should be told: "Behold the law under which you want to live; if you can observe it, enter; if not, freely depart." Three times the entire Rule is read to the candidate, and three times the ceremony is repeated. Therefore I would also say that in the future anything is possible as long as it is compatible with the Rule of Saint Benedict. Anything that clearly departs from the Rule could be a good development, but it would not be within the Benedictine tradition, strictly speaking.

FATHER HOPKO: For us this whole question presents a terrible problem, because we consider the Orthodox Church to be primarily a church of tradition. We also say, however, that the tradition is not contained in any one book or set of books. It is contained in the spiritual life. And as my teachers always said, the Christian church, just as life itself, must be constantly changing in order to remain the same. But how we come to know what the essence is, what we live and fight for, is the very meaning of prayer, meditation, reading, and everything we do in the spiritual life.

We claim that every member of the church—not just the bishops, not just the priests, and not just the religious, but *everyone*—is responsible for the church. If anyone sees something that they consider not to be in the spirit of the tradition, they must say so. Then it has to be fought out. The

whole history of our church is a history of fighting out controversy. It has gone from controversy to controversy. That is a sign of its life. The church is always in controversy, struggling to clarify and struggling to bear witness. It is not a struggle based on what *I* want or *I* don't want. We don't change something just to change it. We live within the forms we have received. But then, when it is necessary to defend the faith, or the truth, we must be like a lion. So we say: in defense of the faith, a lion; in defense of the self, a lamb. When the time comes, the battle can be bloody—spiritually bloody as well as literally bloody. As one example, Maximus the Confessor fought over the controversy of who Jesus Christ is. He fought for the truth that Jesus Christ, as incarnate God, has real humanity: he has human freedom, human passions, and human emotions. His adversaries claimed that Christ was without true human freedom, energy, and will. They threw Maximus in prison, cut off his tongue so he couldn't speak, and cut off his hands so he couldn't write. He languished there with a certain Martin of Rome until they both died. Twenty years later a consensus of the faith decreed that Maximus was right, and so now he is called Saint Maximus the Confessor. On the other hand, both Honorius, the Pope of Rome, and Sergius, the patriarch of Constantinople, were posthumously anathematized for having borne witness to a false teaching that was not in accord with the experience of Christ. And so, life goes on. The important point is that we each bear responsibility for the tradition. Maximus didn't say, "I'll leave with Martin and start my own church." He said, "I will bear witness to the truth even if you kill me."

LODRÖ DORJE: I suppose tradition is primarily a question of how the essence of the teachings could be most successfully contained. In general, I think the degree of flexibility a spiritual community can manifest while still remaining true to the essence of the tradition depends on the style of the teacher or spiritual director. It might be interesting to say a little about the continuity of tradition in the case of Vajradhatu, which is the Buddhist sangha under the direction of the Venerable

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. In the beginning of its evolution as a community, the primary question was how to bring the Vajrayana teachings from Tibet into Western technological society, with its completely different cultural heritage and worldview. The transplanting process presented a number of problems: in particular people's fascinations and preconceptions around Eastern culture, asceticism, possible spiritual experiences, and so on. In response to this situation, Rinpoche began by taking a big cultural leap himself. He decided to surrender his personal Tibetan monastic culture and to enter into the Western mentality. His teaching then began with an introduction to the basic background of the teachings, which is to say, with the practice of meditation itself. Beyond that, there was little prescribed form. Rinpoche seemed to be trusting the mandala principle, which is that within the space of reality, dharma, or teachings, spontaneously arise. It was an extremely roomy sort of containment, to the point that many people thought it was a free-style improvisation that had little or nothing to do with the formal tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

Gradually a bridge has been made between the formlessness of the pure lineage transmission and the relative, social reality of the sangha, which in the beginning consisted of a group of primarily counterculture, spiritually-interested Westerners. Over the years Rinpoche has encouraged his students to become involved with business, families, and social enterprises, and at the same time he has also gradually introduced traditional Mahayana and Vajrayana liturgies, practices, and teachings. Most recently, elements of the monastic tradition, such as *oryoki*, a ritualized style of eating practiced in Chinese and Japanese Zen monasteries, and the traditional precepts or moral code, have been introduced in the context of certain intensive practice programs. Generally it could be said that Rinpoche has taken an evolutionary approach in bringing together the basic realization, or essence of the tradition, on the one hand, with the students' sociological and experiential background on the other. Each step of the way has been determined by the overall level of understanding

present in the group mind. As practitioners develop a growing sense of meditative awareness, the meaning of the form can then be more easily transmitted to newcomers. In this way, because the community has an experiential understanding of what it is doing, new community members soon begin to get a feeling for what it is about. Our style is becoming more and more traditional, and the containment is becoming increasingly articulated. Interestingly, the container that has been evolving is not so much in the tradition of monasticism, as it was primarily in Tibet, but in the tradition of the Buddhist understanding of enlightened society. In other words, we are learning how we could exhibit nonaggression and compassion in our Western domestic and social environments, while also incorporating formal spiritual practice into our lives.

EIDO ROSHI: I can see we have examples here of two different ways of moving between the formality and the essence. The essence of the buddha-dharma already pervades everywhere, even prior to heaven and earth. What we need to transmit geographically, from East to West, are the Buddhist scriptures, as well as a certain formality. Through the transmission of formality, people are then able to realize the essence of the Buddha. I was quite interested, Lodrö, that you said your community is getting more and more traditional. When I visited Boulder five years ago, I was shocked by the sloppiness of the Vajradhatu students' sitting posture. When I spoke about this with Trungpa Rinpoche he said to me, "You Zen people are so strict. You start with such strict formality at the beginning. But we, on the other hand, start by taking it easy, and then gradually, gradually we introduce the tradition." Now, five years later, I realize that this was true. I see a great change. So this is one way. It is how the transmission of Tibetan Buddhism is taking place. You began in a casual American way, and gradually more and more tradition was introduced. Another way is what I am doing. I started with a stubborn Japanese tradition, and now gradually I am Americanizing.

## Liturgy as Continuity

Judith Lief  
Thomas Hopko  
David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.

**JUDY LIEF:** In Vajrayana Buddhism, every initiation into a new ritual or meditation practice is accompanied by the oral transmission of an accomplished teacher. The teacher communicates the essence of the form, and that human connection transforms the text, gesture, or activity into a sacred empowerment. So, personal transmission is what gives life to the traditional forms. In fact, the continuity of that personal transmission from teacher to disciple is the key factor in determining whether a lineage of teachings is unbroken and therefore continues to be vital. I am wondering whether other traditions also place such importance on the role of oral transmission.

**FATHER HOPKO:** There is certainly a similar element in the Eastern Orthodox Church. We experience a transmission called "the mind of Christ," which can also be identified as "the mind of the Church" or even "the mind of the Fathers." How does one have access to this transmission in a living way? Through the *lex orandi*, the corporate liturgy of the church, one can go beyond personal meditation and prayer to experience the meditation and prayer of the community. In a sense, liturgical prayer is the prayer of Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit. We believe that when we enter into the liturgy of the church, by singing with the community, contemplating the mystery, and so on, we enter into the relationship of Christ, the Father, and the Holy Spirit: we enter into the interpersonal communion of the Godhead. Even during the practice of personal meditation, there is this living situation within which we pray. This context is made concrete through the daily and seasonal rhythms of liturgy. There are morning, noon, and evening periods when the entire church prays, and there is also a common liturgical calendar. For example, on the sixth of August every Orthodox church in the world is contemplating

the transfiguration of Christ. That creates a kind of continuity within which personal prayer takes place. When new liturgical elements are introduced into the church, they have to be in harmony with this context. So for us this is one means of ensuring a continuity of transmission.

**BROTHER DAVID:** I would add that in the Benedictine tradition, the atmosphere of the monastery, which includes the way time and space are arranged, plays an important role in the initiation and transmission process. In general, participation in the atmosphere of the liturgy is the vehicle by which the Catholic tradition is transmitted and contained. In fact, the liturgy is the teacher. The catechism is just a minor intellectual appendage. One must admit, however, that nowadays this is often not understood.

**JUDY LIEF:** Father Hopko, in your tradition do you have certain formal occasions, as we do in Vajrayana Buddhism, where the teacher or spiritual master elucidates on the meaning of the liturgy and helps you to tune into the important aspects of it, or perhaps confirms what you have experienced in relation to it?

**FATHER HOPKO:** Yes, but there is a sense in which when you explain the liturgy, it is not the liturgy anymore. To explain the liturgy is like trying to explain a poem: if the meaning the poem is carrying could be completely explained, the poem wouldn't have been written in the first place. The written liturgy, like a genuine poem, is a term of reference; the real experience is beyond words. So I would say that the words and the rituals aren't necessarily our teachers. They are the means of access to the teacher. The teacher is the lived experience. In that sense, the liturgy is ultimately silent.

It is interesting that, in the earliest days of the church, a person didn't learn the Lord's Prayer until relatively late in the process of his or her preparation for baptism and holy communion. For almost the first five hundred years of the Orthodox Church, a non-baptized person never saw the eucharist and never heard the Lord's Prayer, because only the

initiate who had been sacramentally enlightened could call on the most high, all-holy, unconditioned, boundless God as "our Father" and enter into communion with him in the holy eucharist. This was also true of such teachings as the Holy Trinity and those concerning the Virgin Mary. Such "mysteries"—formally called the "dogmas"—were not discussed by neophytes and those just starting on the way. I think the process of initiation into the mysteries is one of the important things we can be reminded of by Buddhism, because to a large extent this has been lost in Christianity. You just can't tell someone everything all at once. Intellectually he can't understand it, and spiritually he can't bear it, because he hasn't yet had the illuminative experience that allows him to see.

## One Voice

Thomas Keating O.C.S.O.

As we study and open ourselves to the wisdom of the world religions, we become more and more amazed to see a certain commonality and unity in the area of human values. I personally feel that this commonality has not been adequately grasped, and that if it could be, this would make an extraordinary difference in the world today. In the political arena, problems are still being resolved on the level of raw power, and there is no possibility of overcoming violence at that level. In fact, at this point, the political process has brought the human family to its maximum risk potential. The spiritual dimension, which is present in each of the world religions, is precisely what is needed so badly today. But historically the world religions have tended to oppose themselves to each other, with each being exclusivistic and claiming to be *the* path to the Ultimate Mystery. Out of a naive loyalty, people have fought for their respective religions to the point of blood. But through spiritual confrontation, we are discovering a deep commonality that is more profound than the divergences we also encounter in genuine dialogue.

My hope is that, if we could articulate the points of agreement among