

“Vademecum” in rapporto con tutti gli inizi, con i metodi e con i risultati circa le ricerche sulle origini del monachesimo» (p. 88).

Particolarmente olungo è il capitolo su Friedrich Heiler, definito un «grande riformatore del monachesimo». Si nota in lui una nuova esposizione che lo inserisce nella “teologia evangelica”, cominciando addirittura da Lutero. A lui si deve una vera e propria «riconsiderazione del monachesimo nel protestantesimo» (pp. 265-266).

Gli autori considerati si sono tutti dedicati alla ricerca storica, intesa come attuazione di una maniera di esistenza ascetica ed aperta a indicare il cammino verso «un nuovo monachesimo». Certamente, questo non sempre il motivo centrale degli scritti, ed anzi ha talvolta «un ruolo secondario», come si nota in Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Si tratta comunque, anche per questo autore, di scritti ecumenici, con riflessioni che hanno esercitato notevole influenza nel Novecento. Ciò vale anche per le opere di Walter Nigg, che mostrano il tentativo di favorire nell’ambiente protestante un approccio a santi e monaci, associando il monachesimo alla mistica e rilevandone il significato interiore (p.803), soprattutto per una vita di preghiera.

I risultati dei singoli capitoli di questo importante libro di Bernd Jaspert dimostrano l’esistenza di una vera apertura ecumenica in autori protestanti. Ciò significa un non escludere, nei protestanti, un approdo ad un ristabilimento di una piena comunione del cristianesimo. Le discussioni dei vari autori fanno emergere suggerimenti e proposte concrete per la realizzazione di un ecumenismo spirituale. Ne deriva un utile suggerimento alla lettura del libro anche da parte dei cattolici. L’opera, in ogni caso, costituisce una testimonianza sicura del desiderio, anche da parte dei protestanti, di arrivare ad un’unica Chiesa cristiana, così come auspica anche l’attuale sommo pontefice, Benedetto XVI.

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Vita spiritualis

ERNEST E. LARKIN, *Contemplative Prayer for Today: Christian Meditation*. 2007, pp. 151. Medio Media, 627 N. 6th Ave., Tucson, Arizona 85707, U.S.A. / St. Mark’s, Mysselton Square, London, EC1R 1XX, United Kingdom (www.mediomedia.org). ISBN 978-1-933182-55-1. \$11.95.

In discursive meditation you use the imagination, the power to picture to yourself scenes from the life of Christ, as a means to help you draw closer to the Lord. Using this power, you also listen to his words spoken in the scene you are thinking about and draw out conclusions, and enter into a conversation with the Lord about the scene and his words to you. Through this exercise you get to know Jesus better and you grow in love of him. As a result, you make resolutions to live a life that is more in harmony with his

teachings and demands. The practice of discursive meditation, then, leads to a reform of life, the correction of bad habits and the fostering of good habits or, as these are also called, the virtues. This practice of discursive meditation was the kind of prayer that novices in the spiritual life were advised to take up. And sometimes it was the only kind of prayer that people were encouraged to practice. The contemplation that followed discursive meditation came only after many years, and you needed to have special signs for such prayer. Discursive meditation is similar to another form of prayer known as *lectio divina*, a form of prayer taught to and practiced mainly by monks. In this prayer form we approach God by reading the Scriptures and reflecting on them with our reason, using imagination and feelings to stir up faith and love. The four acts of reading (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*), praying (*oratio*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*) can be followed in order or any one of them can become the focus of the moment. The first three are active ways of approaching Christ, the fourth way shifts gears and relates to Christ present within. In the first three acts we take hold of Christ in order to grow in likeness to him. This transformation begins in baptism and grows through the practice of the Christian life, especially the life of prayer. This prayer ends in an awareness of the presence of Christ in my life. The process uncovers and reveals God, and we end up in silence like Mary of Bethany sitting at the feet of Jesus. Too often, in the past, the end of this form of prayer was short-circuited and the whole time was spent on being active. The contemplative dimension, the better part, was short-changed. The desire to insure the contemplative moments has been one of the reasons for the search for a more explicit way of contemplative prayer.

Before his entrance into the Benedictine monastery John Main had learned the practice of the mantra from a Hindu holy man, Swami Satyananda, and he found it eminently helpful. But his novice master thought differently and told the docile novice to discontinue it as something alien and foreign to Christian practice. He was to take up discursive meditation, the common form of mental prayer in religious orders at the time. This meant using the imagination and reason to think about and converse with God. He was obedient to the direction. It led to a long, ten-year spiritual desert. The mantra had nourished John Main for years, and now he was bereft of this source of grace. But later in his life through study of the roots of Christian prayer in the New Testament and early Church writers, he came to realize that this way of praying was the earlier form of meditation in the Church. Discursive meditation came later. Meditation with a mantra had a long history in the Church in classic forms like the Jesus Prayer, popular for centuries among the Orthodox monks on Mount Athos and a fixture in the Hesychast tradition. Father John chose to call his mantra prayer, in which the mantra *maranatha* is repeated throughout the meditation period and not just occasionally, Christian Meditation.

Fr. Ernest Larkin who had spent most of his life pursuing the topic of prayer as a desired personal goal and the object of theological study and

research was moved to write this book to share what he considered to be a great gift to the contemporary church: a method of contemplative prayer. Much of his thought flows from his own experience. This means that he must draw a great deal from his experience as a Carmelite. One of the best chapters in the book, in fact, is the chapter in which he interfaces Carmelite spirituality and Christian Meditation, beginning with the early history of the Carmelite family through its apogee in the great Carmelite doctors of the church, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. In other chapters he explains the dynamics of Christian Meditation and gives further illustrations about this from his own experience. He looks into desert spirituality at the root of the Carmelite tradition and the teaching on Christian Meditation, and in the end he treats of mindfulness, another basic feature of all contemplative life and prayer. Some of the material has already appeared in other publications, but fits together well as a part of this book.

John Main's program is one of utter simplicity. He does not stress, though he may acknowledge in theory, the abstract differences between active prayer and contemplation or the different degrees of contemplation. But he treats them as one spiritual practice and says explicitly that meditation, meditative prayer, contemplation, and contemplative prayer are all synonyms. There is no need to measure where one is on the path. The important thing is to grow in purity of heart and receptivity to divine grace. This journey, Fr. Larkin holds, is the same in both John of the Cross and John Main, but it is described from different viewpoints. The repetition of the mantra can get one going on the journey and help one stay on the path. The silence of the mantra produces purity of heart. And the reward of purity of heart is the love of God and neighbor found in the gift of contemplation. The work of the mantra helps you escape from your old self created by many false desires.

What Fr. Larkin shows mainly in this book is how the Carmelite tradition and Christian Meditation dovetail. They fit beautifully together. Christian Meditation is a new way of understanding and applying the Carmelite tradition. The friends of Carmel, and all who are searching for a practical way of prayer, can thank Fr. Larkin for this excellent book.

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YOSHIKAWA, NAOË KUKITA, *Margery Kempe's Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literature, Liturgy and Iconography*. 2007, pp. xii, 193. University of Wales Press, 10 Columbus Walk, Brigantine Place, Cardiff, CF10 4UP, U.K. (www.wales.ac.uk/press). ISBN 978-0-7083-1910-9. £60.00.

In this carefully researched study, Naoë Yoshikawa states her intentions clearly: firstly she aims to contextualise Margery Kempe's meditations within the liturgy and devotional practices experienced in the parish; the second