

## INTRODUCTION

Zen Buddhism has many stories which provide a medium for its teaching. One is that of Enyadatta. The story is said to have occurred at the time of the Buddha.

Enyadatta was a beautiful maiden who enjoyed nothing more than gazing at herself in the mirror each morning. One day when she looked into her mirror she found no head reflected there. Why not on this particular morning the sutra does not state. At any rate the shock was so great that she became frantic, rushing around demanding to know who had taken her head. "Who has my head? Where is my head?" I shall die if I don't find it!" she cried. Though everyone told her, "Don't be silly, your head is on your shoulders where it has always been," she refused to believe it. "No, it isn't! no it isn't! Somebody must have taken it!" she shouted, continuing her frenzied search. At length her friends, believing her mad, dragged her home and tied her to a pillar to prevent her harming herself. ....

Slowly her close friends persuaded her that she had always had her head, and gradually she came to half-believe it. Her subconscious mind began to accept the fact that perhaps she was deluded in thinking she had lost her head. ....

Suddenly one of her friends gave her a terrific clout on the head, upon which, in pain and shock, she yelled, "Ouch!" "That's your head! There it is!" her friend exclaimed, and immediately Enyadatta saw that she had deluded herself into thinking she had lost her head when in fact she had always had it.

(Elated) she rushed around exclaiming: "Oh, I've got it! I have my head after all! I'm so happy.<sup>1</sup>

This story for the Buddhist illustrates the way that most persons are not aware that they have "Buddha nature" even though to have Buddha nature is characteristic of being human as well as of all the universe. Though "Buddha nature" is not an exact equivalent to "spiritual nature", it will suffice. The binding of Enyadatta is equated with sitting in contemplation, stilling the body until the mind has a measure of tranquility. The counsel of her friends is compared to the instructions of a spiritual leader. The blow with the stick represents an actual practice of some Buddhist teachers, believing that if the contemplating person is struck at the right time it will precipitate "enlightenment." In such a moment at the same time you discover who you are and what life truly is. What a relevant parable for our time.

We live today as inheritors of the 18th century Enlightenment where the development of scientific method and historical criticism brought religious traditions and institutions into question. Though science and historical method have moved far beyond the approaches of the 18th and 19th century, popular understanding has not caught up with this. Modern urban life style, where many are in contact only with the world of human creation, where light comes from a switch, milk from a carton, meat in a package, and a few potted plants struggle for temporary splashes of sun through a window, loses all contact with the mystery of existence and the life forces beyond human control. To this must be added the fact that our

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1. *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice and Enlightenment*, compiled and edited, with translations, introductions and notes by Philip Kapleau, foreword by Huston Smith, revised and expanded, Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1980, p. 57.

religious traditions describe the relationship of God with history and experience through terms such as "omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent." This was natural before the development of our modern understanding of the world which came to see the events of history and nature as due to other causes. Thus for some the description of God within the traditions no longer sounds real or identifiable with the phenomena of present experience. Add to this the desires of humanity since the Renaissance to be free of the God of the traditions who, like a domineering parent, seeks to dominate all, who limits human value and existence, who judges as sin the desire for human maturity, and punishes humanity with the tragic conditions of human existence. All of this, described within the narrative of the Fall in Gen. 2-3, has produced a modern amnesia of the spiritual nature of both human existence and the world in which we live.

And yet human spirituality keeps on reasserting itself. At the end of the "God is dead" period of the 1960s Peter Berger published his *Rumor of Angels*, significantly subtitled *Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. In the late 1980s we see the many spiritual or pseudospiritual movements called "The New Age."

Perhaps we would not express what has been forgotten as in our "head," for the "head" is for us symbolic of the analytic and scientific methodologies of our time which have distanced us from religion and spirituality. A better image for us might be the "heart", understood as the intuitive center of our being which symbolizes appreciation for the Transcendent, a holistic sensing of life (in contrast to intellectual analysis), and the spiritual nature of our being.

It is interesting that in the last twenty years, like Enyadatta, something has struck us. What has struck many are the frustrations and limitations of human existence which have produced a crack in the existential wall that we might see another dimension. Then there are those whose heart God has struck at the right time, as a good teacher who knows that the student is ready to understand and see. This is what Jesus did when he called upon those who have ears to hear and eyes to see. Thus one of the characteristics of the "post modern" era may be that of a rebirth or a remembering of human spirituality. We may yet find our hearts.

To find our hearts is important because in a secularized and pluralistic world, with the authority of the church demythologized, we need to carry our religious reality with us and make ethical decisions without much cultural, societal and institutional support. The personal appropriation of spiritual reality and the responsibility for ethical decisions is also part of human maturity.

The Canadian Jesuit John English, in the early post-Vatican II years, wrote a significant book on journaling as a basis for ethical decisions, against the background of the Ignatian concern for "discernment" of the will of God. He believes that there are three modern phenomena which enter significantly into contemporary Christian decision-making: "the new sensitivity to interior spiritual activity, the growing sense of the importance of the historical in personal matters, and in an impersonal world, the felt need to make wise personal decisions."

The many changes in the Church and in the world in the past fifteen years raise the crucial question of how one makes authentic Christian decisions today. Life is more complex; there is a new emphasis on personal responsibility; and a new appreciation of the way God acts in the lives of each of his people.<sup>2</sup>

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2. John English, *Choosing Life: Significance of Personal History in Decision-making*, NY: Paulist Press, 1978, pp. 5,1.

When we speak about religion this way we are moving beyond concepts and institutions to religion as an aspect of human existence and experience. One of the central difficulties for most of us is that we have forgotten the great mystical traditions of Christianity and don't know what to do with Christian experience. Until the 1980s there was very little treatment of spirituality in seminaries whose primary focus was the transmission of information and the development of professional competence.<sup>3</sup> Similarly the transmission of faith within the churches has often been in terms of right belief and information, and parishioners who have religious experiences wonder with whom they may discuss them.

Thus Tilden Edwards, Episcopal priest and founder of the Shalem Institute in Washington, DC, describes his sabbatical journey to California in 1973 in search of a spiritual guide as ultimately leading to a Tibetan study center in Berkeley.<sup>4</sup> In his book on spiritual direction he exclaims:

My plea is that we explore much more deeply the experiential tradition of the Church, lest we have no conscious unique inner heart left to offer, or just the very shrunken heart of the hard-shell fundamentalist or vague sentimentalist.<sup>5</sup>

My own life has been a journey which, if shared, will perhaps make this book more understandable.

Though having extensive contacts with the Roman Church and other Protestant denominations, I came out of a background of a Moravian Church strongly influenced by American conservative theology not characteristic of much of the Moravian heritage. The Ancient Moravian Church which existed in what we now know as the Czech Republic from 1457 until the Thirty Years War was characterized by an understanding that only the triune God and the human response in faith, love and hope were "essential" and all else was "ministerial" to that, the "ministerials" often being expressed in various "incidentals" (forms) in various contexts. After the War the exiled Moravian Bishop, John Amos Comenius, the "father of modern education" who represented the best of the Ancient Church, dedicated his life to maintaining its heritage. A few congregations in Poland and the Moravian Episcopacy survived. The Moravian Church was institutionally revived 100 years after its legal demise, in Saxony in the 1720s on the estate of the German nobleman, Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf was a Lutheran pietist who represented a different approach to Pietism than that taught at Halle where he had once been educated. His distinctive perspectives were shaped by his own Christocentric religious experience, his insights into the Ancient Moravian heritage, his rediscovery of Luther, and his experimentation with Christian life and mission in the "laboratory" of the Renewed Moravian Church. Zinzendorf viewed religion as a matter of the heart relationship with the Savior who is also Creator of the world (according to John 1, Heb. 1 and Col. 1). All institutional, conceptual, liturgical expressions of this relationship were historically and culturally conditioned, not by accident but by the intent of the Savior and thus the treasures preserved in each tradition must be valued. This heart relationship with the Savior cuts across all denominational boundaries and, because the Savior is also Creator, all the boundaries of the world's great religions which know there is a Creator. The function of the Christian mission is to follow the leading of God's Spirit as "she" works as the "Mother" of humankind, preparing hearts to understand that their Creator is their Savior.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Roman Catholic and Anglican/Episcopal seminaries still treated spiritual formation and ascetical theology, but often in traditional forms which did not correlate with human experience.

4. See Tilden Edwards, *Living Simply Through the Day: Spiritual Survival in a Complex Age*, NY: Paulist Press, 1977.

5. Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction*, NY: Paulist Press, 1980, p. 33.

6. Zinzendorf understood the "heart" as the inner spiritual person, brought to life by the Spirit of God, and having its own intuitive sense of perception. Thus the relationship of the Savior with the heart was understood as objective, not subjective, much in the sense of Teresa of Avila's intellectual vision.

My discovery of the Moravian heritage I really owe to my New Testament Professor and advisor during graduate studies at Princeton Theological Seminary, Otto Piper, whose interest in hermeneutics led me to a doctoral dissertation on the hermeneutics of Zinzendorf, and consequently his theology.

While pursuing my doctorate I served a new congregation for eight years, thus having some laboratory in which to explore the meaning of what I had learned. In 1961 I was called to teach at Moravian Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, and a few years thereafter was asked to represent the Seminary at the meetings of the Lilly Endowment Project for the Deepening of the Spiritual Life of the Seminary faculty, directed by Charles Whiston, an Episcopal priest, former missionary in China, and then professor of Systematic Theology at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. This program was to nourish my spiritual life and prod my thought for the next ten years and Whiston was to remain a spiritual guide and friend until his death. In the 1970s I became responsible for short term continuing education at our Seminary and began to program leaders of the developing spiritual formation movement who, along with the opportune discovery of significant literature, provided gifts beyond measure.

Along with these experiences came a growing awareness that if I was to continue to teach New Testament Theology I had to find a viable approach. The New Testament contains not just one but many theologies, each with its characteristics and peculiarities. It was evident in such areas as Christology and Eschatology that the early church was struggling with how to express the reality it experienced through religious perspectives and terminologies borrowed from its culture. It needed to refine this under the guidance of God's Spirit, distinguishing between Christian content and cultural form, appraising where borrowed perspectives brought over baggage which did not prove true. Thus it seemed to me that the only legitimate way to teach New Testament theology was to suggest to students the practice of a spiritual discipline, which would enhance contact with the reality to which the New Testament authors bore witness and would encourage a conscious attempt to correlate biblical concepts with their own experience. Through the resonance or tension of their spiritual experience with biblical concepts, and exploring the process of "language refinement" already underway in New Testament times, we might understand that to which the New Testament language pointed.<sup>7</sup> By 1980, with the Association of Theological Schools advocacy of the teaching of Spiritual Formation, my New Testament Theology course became the Seminary's course in Spiritual Formation. The new direction of the course now necessitated whole new areas of exploration, some of which will be evident in this book. This course then became a new laboratory in which to explore Christian truth and life, with the help of students who came to include not only those preparing for parish ministry, but area pastors and students specializing in pastoral counseling. Their insights and needs spurred further development of the course.

Another major influence in my life was the experience of life's harshness, including loss of a baby, the 20 year illness of my first wife, and struggles with my own health. All naive illusions about a simple world where things worked out right, about the possibility of being righteous in simple black and white terms, about valuing persons in relationship to productivity, about God as my powerful rescuer (if only I had enough faith), went out the window. These experiences taught me as much theology as any text book. I came to value Bonhoeffer's poem which contrasts human expectations of God with a different Christian perspective:

Men go to God when they are sore bestead, ...  
All men do so, Christian and unbelieving.

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<sup>7</sup>. This is by no means intended to mean that the *only* rule for judging the truth of biblical ideas is how they fit our experience.

Men go to God when he is sore bestead,  
Find him poor and scorned, without shelter or bread,  
Whelmed under weight of the wicked, the weak, the dead:  
Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving.

God goeth to every man when sore bestead,  
Feedeth body and spirit with his bread,  
For Christians, heathens alike he hangeth dead:  
And both alike forgiving.<sup>8</sup>

For Bonhoeffer, for Zinzendorf (as for Luther, who strongly influenced him) , and for Paul, the cross had to remain an essential part of the paradigm of life and spiritual experience.<sup>9</sup>

Life is a strange journey the meaning of which one only discovers by living it, by receiving its blessings (and there are many) and exploring suffering and tragedy rather than fleeing it. Whatever life and God are, this is to be found in the midst of life's complexity and mystery, and what one can be is in the midst of what is.

As I tell my students, what I teach and write comes out of my study and life process and bears the marks of my experience and perspectives. Final answers are hard to come by. The best I can do is to offer what I have discovered. Others may bring new or different insights to our common journey. To speak of the mysteries of God and life is like stammering to express that which transcends speech and thought. But the fact that we speak, bears witness.

Spiritual Formation keeps persons in ministries rooted in the Reality of which they speak and in whose Name they function. Of the many who have taken the Spiritual Formation course over the years, it was among those who were educated for ministry without training in spirituality and then experienced years of ministry without its resources that the need for a course in Spiritual Formation was most clearly perceived. An area pastor shared in a paper:

It is scary. It makes one stop and think. After twenty years in the ministry, to get the feeling of emptiness and voidness in the soul, is a scary feeling. Such is the feeling that I began to

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8. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, NY: Macmillan, 1967, pp. 224-225.

9. To assert that the cross is a primary part of the paradigm of Christian experience does not neglect the power of the resurrection, Spirit and the Gospel. It is to understand the mystery of the power of God as present in the paradox of the cross, that God was acting even in the moment of "forsakenness." Such an assertion stands over against triumphalism, a theology of glory, where all is seen to be power and life is thought to be transcended. The Lenten Liturgy of the Moravian Church used to conclude with: "Christ crucified, remain our confession of faith." The meaning of this was understood as too narrow by those who developed the Lenten Liturgy in the present hymnal and they changed these words to: "Christ, our crucified, risen and ascended Redeemer, shall remain our confession of faith." But by doing so they lost the perspective and emphasis which Zinzendorf and earlier Moravians intended. By saying too much they said too little.

I have found helpful the model of "consubstantiation" to describe the presence of God in life, rather than "transubstantiation." These terms of older theological debate regarding the presence of Christ in the Lord's supper argue whether the elements are changed by Christ's presence (transubstantiation) or whether Christ is present with and among the elements, but they themselves remain unchanged (consubstantiation). Consubstantiation for me expresses the presence of God among the elements of life that are as they are, and that has been my experience. God has always been there though the elements of life have not changed. If only "life" was there, there would be no significant witness to be borne. But God was also there: the reality of God 'midst the reality of life.

experience in the last few years. I felt a certain vagueness within myself in relation to God and things spiritual. .... I believed in God, but there was a feeling of doubt about his activity and presence in my life. .... I began to see that, after twenty years of endeavoring to nourish and nurture the people in my congregations, I was not being nourished and nurtured. I was failing to nourish myself in my spiritual life. .... I began to realize that I was almost like a pump in the service station, which exists to dispense that which is within, into the tanks of the cars that drive up to it. The pump however cannot pump by itself. It needs a source of power outside itself (or within it)...

Another commented:

I have always depended on direction from the outside of myself, the right theology, the right answers to the right questions. It seemed to me that this approach held out the hope for personal fulfillment and proper direction in my life. I am now to the point in my life where such solutions are no longer satisfying. I have always operated on the deductive approach to life and now I am changing to a more inductive approach. The answers I am looking for are not to be found in neat formulas of faith but rather in experiencing what and who I am. For me it now seems that the answers I am seeking can be found from within myself, in who I am in relationship with my God.<sup>10</sup>

The book begins with the metaphor of spiritual journey as prelude to exploring the reader's journey through writing a spiritual autobiography. It continues with a second chapter which explores definitions of Spiritual Formation and direction, a brief history of the contemporary spiritual formation movement, relevant theological issues, and then various perspectives such as liberation, feminine, and creation spiritualities and the centrality of love to Christian spirituality. The next six chapters deal with "discerning life." The space devoted here presupposes that if the spiritual dimensions of life are to be understood they must be set in the context of the total experience of life in its complexity. Thus such subjects are treated as suffering and death, the presence of God, the experience of evil, the role of body and sexuality, psychological models, and finally, ways of understanding spiritual variety through psychological type and the stages of faith development. The book will then conclude with chapters on the formation of a spiritual discipline, the spiritual reading of Scripture, meditation and contemplation, discernment, and the spiritual direction of others. The latter will consider not only spiritual direction for religious professionals, but the development of Spiritual Formation programs for laity. After dealing with so much complexity, the book's conclusion is a discussion of spiritual simplicity according to the perspective of Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf.

In this book I have attempted to make available to the reader many of the resources which were significant in my own journey and which I sought to share with my students, thus the many quotations and reviews of publications. Hopefully this will prove enriching.

	to God knows where.	not know its culmination.
Remember, my friend, the flow of life you feel moving	Trust its movement. You need	Few know where life goes, its fulfillment, until,

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<sup>10</sup>. From class papers.

with surprise,  
you're there  
to reflect;  
only  
to find again  
life rushes on  
to some  
yet undreamed  
destination.

Life's  
more journey  
than destination.  
Arrivals become  
part of  
ongoing process.

It is only  
those  
whom you've touched  
and who've  
touched you  
who become

part of the on-going  
landscape  
of your soul,  
and go with you,  
as does  
God.

God is  
God of journey,  
and of your  
journey.  
So,  
be not afraid.

Where you go  
is  
always  
where  
God  
is --

and I.

Have  
faith  
in  
the mystery  
of your  
Destiny.