

THE CALIFORNIA MEDITATIONS

In her book, *Such Stuff as Dreams are Made On*, Helen Luke mentions entering into a nine-month retreat in 1959. During that time, she compiled a small collection of reflections. This little book, *The California Meditations*, includes some of Helen's first writing and was distributed to only a few friends. It contains many penetrating insights and we share some of them here.

To know all that one is and does as completely superfluous and yet continue being and doing with utmost devotion -- this is humility.

“Unless devotion is given to the thing which must prove false in the end, the thing which is true in the end cannot enter.” (Charles Williams)

“The ecstasy which is wine entered into the lucidity which is water....”
(Charles Williams of the Marriage at Cana)

JUSTICE AND MERCY

“The sky rains down justice and the earth opens and brings forth a Savior”

-- Advent Ember Wednesday Liturgy

What is the “Justice” of God? Certainly not the human notion of reward and punishment here below. It is the justice of the natural order, the strict impartiality of the fact, the rain which falls on good and bad alike; while the Mercy of God is His Grace, descending into and penetrating the natural order, entering the hearts of His chosen, of those who choose.

The mother of God is the earth of humanity, opening herself to that rain from above, receiving and accepting Justice in all its terrible impartiality; and as she does so she fully exposes her heart to the agony of what is. She receives in the same moment the plenitude of Grace and Joy, the ultimate Mercy, that which is to be the “fruit of her womb.”

ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY

To do the ordinary thing in an ordinary way is easy. To do the extraordinary thing in an extraordinary way is easy -- both these kinds of activity are very common indeed.

But to do the ordinary thing in an extraordinary way and the extraordinary thing in an ordinary way is quite staggeringly difficult and very rare indeed. It is the way of the saints.

THE CROSS

Only one, the one mystic, among the apostles was actually present in the flesh at the crucifixion; only he and the women and the sinners. Those who were to spread the Gospel, labour in the (outer) vineyard and themselves suffer martyrdom, were not so present.

Does it mean that the contemplative life can lead a man to such close union with the Cross, with the world's agony, that he must be in some measure withdrawn from outer activity in order to be able to bear it? There is no need for him to be put to death by the world for he is already dead to all things. Christ himself, it should be remembered, was emphatically not simply the greatest of all martyrs. His death was of another order altogether. Many martyrs died singing and praising God. He died in the uttermost dereliction. His death was not a sacrifice, it was THE sacrifice — “full, perfect and sufficient.” So the death through which a Saint John must pass is a sharing The death, not a personal martyrdom. (I think it is true to say that almost none of the greatest mystics who clearly attained to the life of ‘union’ here below were martyrs — St. John of the Cross, Dionysius, Ruysbroek, St. Teresa, Eckhart). St. Teresa says their sufferings interiorly are something hardly to be conceived of by those on the active way. St. Paul is the exception, perhaps.

The women, too, were present. There is a sense in which all women (real women) by nature enter into this death. They know it by their motherhood, physically, instinctively, emotionally and sometimes spiritually. The three Marys are all equally present and know the fact according to their several states of love, though only by the very few is it experienced in a love which has deepened to virginity in the inner meaning of the word. Present also is Salome, the mother of John whose love then gives up her son as she hears him taken from her and given to a greater mother. Finally also the “women of Jerusalem” are there, weeping for the wrong reason, but none the less there and gazing on the fact.

Thirdly, the sinners are present -- those who know not what they do. The thieves on their crosses, suffering with Him in another mode, are offered by Love a supreme movement of choice between recognition and rejection, The soldiers, blind, doing what seems right to them, are therefore exposed to the possibility of awakening, the certainty of forgiveness -- “Surely this was the Son of God.”

Those who were not present were of two kinds. The disciples who had accepted Him were not yet conscious enough (except John) for vision; the Pharisees, who had rejected Him, were no longer blind enough for forgiveness. Each group was in a half—way state of consciousness. The former would move nearer to -- the latter would move further from the great turning point of the life of the soul, which is always and everywhere the Cross.

“The still point of
the turning world —
neither from nor towards. . .”

T. S. Eliot