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Selected talks from

SPIRITUAL MASTERS SERIES

THOMAS KEATING OCSO

The Healing of the Human Condition

Thomas Keating OCSO is a Cistercian monk at St Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass Colorado. He is one of the founders of the Centering Prayer movement and of Contemplative Outreach. He is also active in inter-religious dialogue. His many books include Open Mind Open Heart, and Manifesting God. In these talks, Fr Keating suggests how the practice of contemplative prayer can help in the healing of the human condition.

The selections on this CD are drawn from Fr Keating's talks in Singapore during Holy Week 2001. The complete set of 5 CDs is available from Medio Media.



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SPIRITUAL MASTERS SERIES

The Healing of the Human Condition

THOMAS KEATING OCSO

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Attitudes towards God

What is *my* basic attitude towards God? What do you think of God? Do you like God? Are you afraid of God? Do you come to church and pray because you have to, or you're scared not to? We live out of our attitudes and belief systems. Our emotions proceed from our basic attitudes. Hence, we need to look first into what attitudes we've brought with us from early childhood that are affecting our behaviour, and perhaps secretly influencing the way that we relate to this marvellous Reality that has brought us into existence, and *wants* to bring us into the maximum amount of divine love and light and life than we can possibly receive.

Part of our human condition is that we come into the world without any experience of the divine, and we gradually develop psychologically without an experience of God. It is God and our conscious awareness of God that is human health. This is not a statement of mine but comes from St John of the Cross. Human health, true human health, he says, is the *conscious* experience of God. But, not having that conscious experience, we have to develop attitudes towards God at each level of our human development through childhood.

Sometimes the first attitude we have towards God is that of protector. Then a little later, we hear about God in catechism, and we think of him perhaps as transcendent, as the supreme authority whom we have to obey. Then again, we may experience God as the rewarder of good and the punisher of evil. A little later, we think of God as justice, who is always helping us to understand the difference between right and wrong.

All of these attitudes are normal and to be expected in our human development. But sometimes they are exaggerated and lead to distorted feelings about God, or emotionally charged feelings about God that are not only inadequate but positively harmful. To get rid of false ideas of God, or inadequate ideas of God would be doing God and yourself a great favour. Some of our childish ideas should be put in the wastebasket. They are an insult to the living God and the Abba whom Jesus has revealed, and seeks to communicate to us. This is really the heart of the Christian religion. It is the reception, and the transmission through the Christian community, of the experience of God as Abba, that is as Father, and not just any father but a loving father.

This was a revolutionary idea at the time of Jesus, because the concept of God was of the God of armies. The popular concept was the transcendent God who could only be worshipped in the temple. Many of Jesus' parables speak of moving the place of the sacred from the temple, or sacred times and places to everyday life where God is totally available at every moment by virtue of the divine indwelling.

Right now, I want to look at some really bad ideas or attitudes towards God that are more insulting than anything else. Perhaps this lent you could, with the help of grace, lay them aside once and for all in your spiritual journey. They are the result of

an inadequate idea of God that is pretty endemic for children growing up or receiving a Christian education that is too rigid or strict, from parents who themselves have not outgrown their attitudes, and sometimes even from teachers who should know better.

One pet idea or attitude that children often have is to think of God as a policeman who is always on the watch, not benignly to rescue you from bullies, but watching for your least fault so that he could punish you or make you stay after school, or apply whatever punishments are meted out in a particular milieu. Or again, he is sometimes experienced as a tyrant demanding instant obedience or else.... The commandments as they are presented are sometimes presented outside the context of the Abba that Jesus revealed. Finally, there is the worst one of all: the concept of God with an emotional charge to it as judge, always ready to bring down the verdict of "Guilty". This is a good start to a serious neurosis. In any case, God is not like any of those concepts. They belong to a misguided childhood, and one of the greatest things you can do for yourself is to spit on them. I put it rather strongly because they have deep roots in our emotional system. Emotionally charged thoughts sometimes sit in the unconscious where they secretly influence our actions and attitudes.

Let me give you an example to bring this home. Perhaps some of you have heard about the late Cardinal Hume. He came from a very strict English Catholic background. So, his dear mother was a real "stricty" in the sense that she felt she should discipline the children to prepare them for life. That's okay as long as people take responsibility for their own sanctions and don't blame them on God, which is a favourite practice of some parents. In any case, she brought her children together one day and said to them: "Children, you see that cookie jar there in the pantry? That's only for those feast days that we celebrate in a special way, and I don't want any of you to put your hand in that jar in between meals or at any other time." And her sanction was, "...because God is always watching you".

Notice the resonance of 'policeman' there. Now this young man in his youth, Basil Hume, was a sensitive child who was developing a great trust in God and so sure enough he didn't put his hand in the jar; I don't know about the other children. His idea of God now changed. This is a story he told on himself to the American bishops during a retreat that he gave. So this little boy is now thinking about God not as a trusting, loving father that he had started out with, but as this hazardous personage that could punish him for the slightest fault such as eating a cookie in between meals. Here he was now thinking of God like this; years passed. Without her intending it, this good woman retarded his spiritual life maybe ten or twenty years.

He said at the end of this story that he shared with the American bishops: "You know, one day, one time, I had a mystical experience of God – that is to say, if you prefer, a contemplative (I use those terms interchangeably) experience of God, in other words a real sense of God's presence. "From that moment on I realised that if as a youngster I had put my hand in that cookie jar, and if God was really watching like a policeman, he would have said: 'Why don't you take another one?'" Now this, I submit, is the God of the Christians. I don't know the other God, and I don't want to. But we all have met this other God in one degree or another. In my generation and in several generations following, this teaching was common doctrine and it emphasised the *fear* of God.

In Scripture we hear about the fear of God, but it's a technical term. It doesn't mean the emotional fear of God. In a psychological age like ours, we translate fear as the *feeling* of fear. But fear really means, most of the time in the Old Testament, a

sense of reverence or a sense of personal integrity in the face of God as Truth, which is a positive attitude, not a negative one towards God.

With each stage in human development, from early childhood into early adulthood, we pass through new ideas and attitudes for God such as I just mentioned: God as protector—and that can be distorted by thinking of God as policeman; or the God of justice can make us think that someone has appointed *us* to judge other people if they misbehave (nobody has, by the way).

So, there is this idea of God as the rewarder of the good and the punisher of the evil that could initiate ideas of doing things not out of the love of God, or out of trust in God, but out of a desire to *placate* God and to guarantee our future successful passage to heaven, or at least to purgatory. But this is not *love*.

What is missing occurs in contemplative prayer: that God is the God of infinite mercy. If you don't have that as a conviction – it's the chief order of your spiritual journey – you don't know God until you know that.

The whole teaching of the parables emphasises that God runs this world not on the basis of justice alone, but mostly through mercy. You only have to think of the parable of the workers in the market place. Remember that those that worked all day long in the heat of the day and sweated it out received the same amount of reward or salary, whatever you call it, as the guys that were invited at the eleventh hour. The parable is set up to make the hearers sympathise with those who worked so hard and didn't get more pay by paying those who came late first. So what are you going to do with a God who says, when they complain, "Can't I do what I like?" What God likes is to show mercy. So, you can't count on the reward of your efforts, or you can't compare yourself to others, because God gives this wonderful life to everybody who asks for it. In a sense, there are no chosen souls, because everybody is chosen. God is the Father; he's totally on our side.

The basic attitude that is suitable for the God of the Christians is invincible trust, unlimited trust. As St Therese of Lisieux, the most recent Doctor of the Church (that means the Church has set its stamp of approval on her teaching), says: You can never have too much confidence in God who is so good and so merciful. And she says elsewhere, "If I had on my conscience every conceivable crime, I would lose nothing of my confidence, but with my heart breaking with sorrow I would throw myself into the arms of God without hesitation, and I know that I would be well received."



Experience of God in Contemplative Prayer

What contemplative prayer tells you is not so much your *idea* of God but it gives God a chance to introduce Himself to you as he really *is*. The secret of doing that is to stop thinking. Thinking is the way that we hinder the unconscious from coming to awareness and dealing with negative feelings and thoughts and attitudes from a truly wise perspective that is based on reason not emotion, and on faith not a false belief-system that happened to be popular in our particular moment of history.

“Don’t you know,” says Paul, “that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” Or again, “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, *Abba*.” That is to say, it is through contemplative prayer, and the efforts to prepare ourselves for *this* encounter with God, that we are able to experience something of the same experience that Jesus had. This is what basically constitutes the Christian tradition. Our tradition is not a series of books, even scripture itself. As important as these are, they’re not as important as assimilating Christ’s very experience of God as *Abba*, which is what all the scriptures, all the sacraments, all good works, all ministries are designed to bring us to. If they take us somewhere else, we should shift things around so that they do.

You can’t enter into a close friendship with someone you are scared to death of; you avoid these people. So we have many young people over the generations – maybe you experienced this in your youth – the only way they can find God is to leave religion for a while, because the very word religion or faith was imbibed with such negative feelings that every time they think of them, they want to run the other way. So the great gift of contemplative prayer is that if you stop thinking even about God during the time of contemplative prayer, these emotions don’t arise. And God then in that healing situation can communicate the mystery of his presence that transcends our idea of happiness, and finally straightens out what really is our calling, and our potential, and our capacity, to enter into a deep union with God that surpasses all understanding.

Why do you think Christ is on this cross? The Father is trying to tell us: I’ll do anything, even throw my own son away, so to speak, in order to convince you that I desperately want to communicate the whole of God to you, personally as well as the community. So really, even at best, until one has had a deeper established relationship with God, we’ve got it backwards. We think we have to earn God’s love, or win God’s favour, or placate God for our offences. This is not the God of the Christians, though it may have a certain amount of truth. It emphasises the wrong aspects of God. So the passion of Jesus is the deepest revelation of the heart of the Father that there is. He has sacrificed there, according to our faith, the Son of his bosom, the Son who knows him as no one else could possibly know him, because he’s been there. And he wants us at any cost to himself to share that experience. That’s what is meant by eternal life. Eternal life is to share profoundly and fully in Christ’s consciousness of

God as Abba: creator, redeemer, the beloved, every good human relationship of love all wrapped into one and magnified trillions of times.

If you think God is absent, then for all practical purposes he is. St Therese warns us that the chief difficulty in prayer is always praying as if God were absent. It's an engaging kind of observation – she was talking to contemplative nuns, by the way – because how stupid can one get? Why pray at all if you think that God is absent? It doesn't make sense. So the gift of contemplative prayer is God's way of presenting us with a way of relating to him that takes us step by step into the fullness of the divine presence.

To heal our attitudes towards God we have to have or cultivate the right relationship to God, and aim at the deepest knowledge of God.

St Paul in his Epistles speaks frequently about the 'deep knowledge' of God, by which he means not ordinary knowledge, not abstract knowledge, not knowledge written in a book, but the kind of knowledge that is intimate, the kind of knowledge that is involved in conjugal love.

In Colossians, Paul prays: "We ask that you may be filled"—not just have a little taste, but may be *filled* with a 'deep knowledge of God's will' through perfect spiritual wisdom and insight. This is God's ambition for each of us.

Again, he says: "I strive to bring you to the deep knowledge of the divine mystery of Christ. In him are to be found hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Knowledge in the sense of absolute, limitless penetration of who the Father is; participation in the Godhead itself.

This is not *my* idea. This is what Jesus is calling us to over and over again in the New Testament. Especially this week, you'll hear on Holy Thursday the priestly prayer of Jesus where he talks about our having the same experience of *unity* with the Father that he enjoys: "...that you may be one in us as the Father and I are one." This is an absolute oneness. And this unity, this depth of knowledge, this fullness of Christ's consciousness, is precisely what is meant by the term 'the Kingdom of God'.

The Kingdom is not a geopolitical project. It's not a place; it's not an institution. It's a state of consciousness. It's not any state of consciousness; not just a holy person's consciousness, but the very consciousness of the Son of God that he has of the depths of the mystery of God's unconditional love.

It is his experience of the Father as *Abba* that is the heart and soul of the Christian religion. I think we could say that the history of the Church is about how well, and how not well at times, the Church and its various communities around the world have transmitted that experience to the people of God.

This is so central to the spiritual journey. We're not trying to find our *own* experience of God, we're trying to experience *Christ's* experience, Jesus' experience of the Father.

Remember that God was looked upon by the Israelites of the time as transcendent, as the God of Armies. It was not their practice – out of respect for that transcendent person – to say the name of Yahweh out loud. Even to this day in Orthodox circles, it's discouraged.

Jesus in his teaching not only speaks of God as Father but he uses this special word, 'Abba' which means 'Loving Father'. So what he has really done is to

revolutionise the sense of God's presence for the people of his time. Not only is God the Creator Father, who is transcendent, but he is also the God who is closer to us than we are to ourselves.

What Jesus wanted to impress us with is that when we pray we are speaking to God, not far away or in a distant heaven, but in our inmost being as the source of our being. A loving presence that is bending over us at all times and nurturing us at every level of our being: body, soul and spirit. 'Abba' has the connotation of intimacy; it really means 'Daddy'. It's a respectful term but one of enormous intimacy and love. The idea of God just being far away, or only present in a sacred place, or at sacred times of the year when the Israelites celebrated their various feasts, is to limit the idea of God. This God, who plays with the stars, and who seems to enjoy the infinitesimal, sub-atomic world which is full of extraordinary events we're told, is the God who dwells within us. He is the God of immense intelligence and love, that is working in us and around us and among us and through all Creation.



Developing a Relationship with God

How do you develop a relationship? How do you get acquainted with anybody that you feel attracted to? You may admire some brilliant professor, or some politician, or some government leader, or sometimes a potential spouse. In any case, you *decide* to get acquainted. So I suppose the first thing you do is to call up and say: “Could I come and see you” or “Can I have a date” as the case may be. And so you prepare yourself to try to make a good impression. You have your tie on straight if you have one, and your hair combed, and so on. And you meet your prospective friend, and it’s very awkward. It’s like walking on eggshells. One is afraid to say the wrong thing, and you don’t know how to begin the conversation. Suppose you had the big idea that you wanted to meet the President of the United States, for instance, and you called up the White House and by some miracle you got an appointment. So you walk in and this great personage greets you friendly enough, but now you’re there you don’t know what to say. Should I talk about the weather? Should I ask him how he liked the count in Florida? And so on. I think he liked it very much, but you wouldn’t know whether this is quite the right approach to this friendship.

Now suppose that you want to get acquainted with God. There isn’t any bigger shot than the divine Reality, the ultimate Reality. So, we’ve decided to get acquainted, and what do you do? You get into God’s presence and you don’t know what to say. What can I say to this presence? Shall I ask him about the weather? I am not sure he’s that interested. So, here is where the churches come to our assistance, and the Christian community, following tradition, suggests some formal prayers that are appropriate. So we learn our conversation with God through these formulas.

This is a great help indeed. But the success of developing an acquaintanceship is in showing up regularly for your appointment or your date. If you fancy a certain person as a candidate for a family life together and you meet each other every Saturday night, suppose you call up one night and say, “Hello, dear heart, I’m sorry I can’t meet you tonight at the usual place. I have a little cold, and I’m sure you’ll understand. I love you. Goodbye.” Next week: “How are you doing?” “I’m better but a friend is coming from the country and I have to show him the sights of Singapore. I love you. See you next week, Bye.” The third week you call up, “Oh I’m just broken hearted that I can’t see you, I can’t keep my date. My mother is coming to town, I have to greet her. Is it okay to plan on next Saturday?” And there’s no sound at the other end of the ‘phone. You can almost hear it going down into its old handle, when ‘phones had such things. What happened to that budding relationship? You didn’t show up for your dates or your appointments and so the other person said, “There are six billion other people in this world, why don’t I look for someone else?” So the secret of success in getting acquainted is to hang out together.

The same process applies to God, only I think Saturday night is not enough, or in his case Sunday morning is not enough. This is a pretty important being or person, there's no word that can describe it, and we have brought with us from early childhood all kinds of habits of thinking and of mind that are real obstacles to this relationship. We are normally quite self-centred and have our own programmes for happiness that are different from God's ideas, and so you really have to hang out a lot. So a daily period of being together is absolutely essential if you are interested in getting to *know* at a deep level this marvellous being that we call God in the Christian tradition.

If you faithfully meet God, encounter God, this encounter is a little difficult because it is not a sense encounter. It's not one that we can perceive, but we have the intention of sitting with God. In contemplative prayer, we basically sit with God in silence and try to disregard the inevitable thoughts or perceptions or sense experiences that go by in our imagination. So it's the intention to consent to God's presence and action that is at the heart of this preparation for the deep knowledge of God. There are various ways of doing this that have been hallowed by tradition and you're perfectly free to choose one or the other. There are quite a few of them, as a matter of fact.

If this acquaintanceship develops, you begin to feel at ease with God. Now you can speak spontaneously out of your own thoughts. You don't use the formulas – these are appropriate for worship – but you can create your own. And you begin to disclose yourself. Just as scripture is really God's self-disclosure, so our prayer begins by being a disclosure of ourselves, what we want, what we think we need, what our aspirations are, or just a simple request for help. One of the most powerful prayers is just one word: 'Help!' God doesn't require a lot of words, but he does require the *intention*. And the purer that intention becomes through this process of acquaintanceship and falling in love, so to speak, with God, the better everything goes in one's life. Changes in our behaviour begin to take place because the encounter and exposure to God's presence through our intentionality begins to change us. We absorb the values that God has, just like any friend will normally have a great effect in your personal life.

At some point, you want to enter into a friendship with Christ. You've reached a point where you can't go backwards or forwards without a commitment. You can withdraw from a casual acquaintance easily enough if you decide you've changed your mind about the relationship. But you can't withdraw from a friend without breaking somebody's heart, perhaps your own. So, a friendship is characterised by a commitment. In the relationship to God, the commitment is the determination to pursue the journey through prayer and action in the service of God and the duties of our state of life, permanently.

It's an enormous step forward. It's like getting married. It's a huge commitment. I'm going to be faithful to this prayer every day. And I'm going to pursue the presence of God more and more in daily life because I know that God wants to be my companion in every detail of my life, and here I am. Let your will be done in me.

The Inner Room

In Matt. 6:6, Jesus suggests how to go about getting deep knowledge, a deep friendship, with this God: the Father, the Abba. Here's how it goes:

If you wish to pray, enter your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Abba [father – that's the word] in secret. And Abba who is in secret will reward you.

The reward, I presume, will be the deep knowledge. Prayer, whatever its expression, is basically a relationship to God; and that relationship, like every human relationship, is supposed to grow. It's a process, through acquaintanceship, at-easiness, friendliness, and then the commitment of friendship, and then the opening of that friendship into inconceivable possibilities of union with the Ultimate Reality, whom we call God, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Notice, Jesus says, 'if you want to pray'. He's talking about, 'if you want to enter the deep knowledge of God'. It presupposes that we have done some acquaintanceship work: that we've hung out enough with God in prayer and rituals and sacraments and service to feel comfortable, in some degree in talking heart-to-heart and in disclosing ourselves and our desires and our troubles and our petitions to the goodness of God.

So Jesus is telling us if you want this relationship to explode, let us say, into its full capacity and ramifications, then here is a little formula for getting started: "Enter your inner room." Where the heck is that? This wisdom saying has been deeply studied by the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the 4th Century, and by many other experts in prayer. They tell us that this is a metaphorical meaning for the spiritual level of our being. Jesus is suggesting that in order to get to know God as the divine indwelling presence that is the basis for a deep friendship and for the spiritual journey itself, then we need to be present to this God for a certain period of time in which nothing else is present, at least nothing else is present *deliberately*. The inevitable flow of thoughts through our imagination is deliberately disregarded. Notice how this wisdom saying serves as the basis or the umbrella formula for every means throughout Christian history through which people have prepared themselves for the great gift of contemplation – the deep knowledge of God.

It is important for us to realise that contemplation is not for some elite group of people who live in a special place with special circumstances that protects them from telephones, television, and work. There's no such place any more, especially work! This invitation is extended to everybody. The inner room is the spiritual level of our being that we're not normally in touch with in everyday life.

Take a moment to reflect on the content of your conscious awareness on a daily basis. It's something like being at a great movie or play, a Greek tragedy or something, where you're totally involved in the plot. The characters, because of the greatness of the actors, are so interesting, either repulsive or attractive, that you spend

the time identifying with them so that you even forget you're in the theatre. It takes a great movie to do that!

This is actually a good metaphor of the way most people lead daily life. They're dominated by the events, people, and their emotional reactions to events, in such a way that they rarely reflect on their freedom to decide what to do with events and with their emotional reactions to them. Our normal state is to be dominated by our emotional responses to events, and hence to miss the freedom of choice that is precisely the work of following the Gospel values. We're habitually trained and educated in this direction. We have, whatever your age is, years of habits of doing this precise thing. What entering the Inner Room, the place where we're closest to God, does for us is that it invites us to let go of our over-identification with external events and our emotional reactions to them. We can then experience the inner freedom of deciding what to do with events insofar as we're free to do so. Some things are inevitable. But our attitude towards things is always our choice, or possibly our choice.

As the Inner Room and our presence there is cultivated and becomes habitual, there is this remarkable shift so that we're like someone at a lousy movie. Now we don't identify with the characters so much, so at any moment we can get up and leave. We don't have to stay emotionally involved in events. We have choices as to what to do with our response. This inner freedom is the great gift of getting acquainted at the deepest level with the deep knowledge of God, with the divine indwelling that is still deeper in us. God awaits us in this Inner Room to share with us the riches of the divine values, which can then change the attitudes and the values that we've brought with us from early childhood and our culture, insofar as we over-identify with them.

In the Inner Room, then, we enter that place by deliberately and intentionally letting go of our ordinary environment, like in a few minutes when we do a period of meditation. You'll be invited to close your eyes; when you close your eyes, half the world disappears, so to speak. It's a symbol of letting go of your external circumstances in order to be totally present to God. This presence is without an intermediary – the intermediary of thoughts or feelings. These are good forms of prayer, but they are suitable at other times. This is a more intimate kind of prayer. It adds and it deepens whatever your relationship is at this moment in your spiritual journey.

Here is the invitation then extended to everybody (because this was offered in the Sermon on the Mount where anybody who happened to be coming down the street listened to Jesus): the willingness to be with God without the covering or the protective colouring of our defensive mechanisms, just to be with God as God is, and just to present ourselves as we are, whoever that is. It doesn't matter who you are, the thing that matters is that you honestly present yourself to God, just as you are, wherever that is, for the divine healing and the awakening of the immense potentialities that lie hidden in our unconscious.

You close the external environment by entering into the Inner Room. You close the door by letting go of our interior dialogue, the thoughts and commentaries that we're so familiar with. They are often about things that are inconsequential to us, but which we are submerged by. The noise, the traffic, and the events and the news and the mass media and work and relationships and all those things push our time to its very limits. They make us feel that we don't have time for this kind of prayer. Yes, we don't have time from that perspective. But actually you'd have *more* time if you

withdrew for this half hour or whatever it is. You will begin to see that there are a lot of things you're doing that you don't have to do. There will be a priority for things you're doing that allows you to postpone things at the bottom of the list. Actually, through this encounter with God's silence, you'll have more time for all the other things you're doing, at least that are worth doing. You may find a few things could be dropped.



Divine Therapy in the Inner Room

What happens in the Inner Room, if you decide to go there? Two major things might sum them up. The first thing that God does when he gets you in the Inner Room is to pour the gift of the Holy Spirit into our inmost being. As Paul says:

God has sent the Spirit of his Son [the Holy Spirit], into our hearts [our inmost being, in the Hebrew concept of 'heart'] crying out loudly, [ecstatically], Abba!

In other words, in the Inner Room you experience who Abba is. You experience Christ's sharing and allowing us to participate in the eternal treasure of the divine goodness and presence, with its infinite resources. In the Spirit, as well as in Christ, are hidden all the riches of wisdom and the deep knowledge of God.

In the Inner Room then the first thing the Divine does, is to affirm our basic goodness. This is terribly important especially in our time, and I guess in every time, where so many people through oppression, social or racial or ethnic or religious even, have a sense of no worth. That's why we seek some sense of worth by belonging to a group, and drawing our identity from that group and our values from that group, in exchange for their esteem and acceptance. This is not a good idea! The Gospel again and again invites us to let go of our over-identification with our emotional programs for happiness, and our over-identification with a particular group or the cultural conditioning from which we emerge.

The second thing that occurs there is the healing of the wounds of the human condition. You might call them the wounds of Original Sin. Theology tells us that there are basically three of them.

- **ILLUSION** – not knowing where true happiness is to be found.
- **CONCUPISCENCE** – which is the craving to find happiness somewhere, because we don't know where to find it.
- **WEAKNESS OF WILL** – which states that if you ever find out where happiness is, the will is too weak to do anything about it anyway, without grace. Grace is what comes to the rescue.

The first thing that God tries to do is to heal the consequences of that disease – and it's a serious one – by affirming our basic goodness and that it's possible for us to roll back, or climb out of, the habits of craving or finding happiness in things that can't possibly give it to us. We can then freely identify with the values of the Gospel, and begin to become in fact the children of God, and not just poor examples of that marvellous dignity.

Really Jesus is saying: I'm offering you the Divine Therapy, for the illness of original sin and its consequences. Join me in the Inner Room, as if you were coming

to my office; the disease is so serious that once a week is not enough. Fortunately this therapy is free of charge.

What God is saying here is: My dear children, I love you so much, but you're so sick that you really need this therapy, and you've got to do it every day, and preferably twice a day, and if you're willing to come, I guarantee that it will work.. Free of charge! It's a marvellous offer. There's nothing like it!

It also goes deeper than ordinary psychotherapy or psycho-analysis. It goes to the roots of our unconscious. It was Freud who discovered the unconscious – maybe 125 years ago – and it's one of the great discoveries of human science, and especially important for the spiritual journey. The mystics intuited it, and they called it by names such as the Dark Nights or similar things. What it really means is that at this level of our conscious life, we're influenced by programmes for happiness put together in our infantile years, in order to cope with the frustration, and the pain, and the emotional fears, and desperation sometimes, that the fragile life of an infant or a child is almost bound to have in some degree.

Our institutions, especially jails, are filled with people who suffered most from an infancy in which their basic human needs were not provided. Unless one is loved, you're going to be terribly sick, and it will take years and years to recover from the wounds of childhood. These wounds can involve a sense of rejection, abandonment, indifference. Actually parenting is probably the greatest vocation there is. Because if parents don't provide for the basic affection, and security, and independence in a reasonable degree that a child needs in order to grow as its consciousness unfolds, then it will spend the rest of its life recovering from childhood. If you add to this physical or sexual abuse, the damage is intolerable. The emotions of a child are not strong enough to handle difficulties of that kind.

In any case all of us suffer some difficulty because the child never has enough security, never enough control or power, never enough affection. The withdrawal of it only increases that craving so that the craving becomes a demand, and then a need, and then the child expects other people to respect these outrageous expectations for controlling everything and having unlimited security. And whenever this is frustrated by events, which is certain to happen, then off go the afflictive emotions of humiliation, anger, fear, shame, discouragement. Then the child (that is us) may be in a mood that continues these feelings, and it can be so traumatised that the pain or the memory of the event itself has to be repressed into the unconscious. Or the child develops compensatory programmes that shield us from the pain, of which probably the chief is an addiction.

The very nature of the human condition initiates what might be called the addictive process, which is the search for ways to avoid the pain of the frustration of the emotional programmes for happiness. These are not just conscious, but rooted in the unconscious, and sometimes deeply repressed because of the force of the wounds and the pain. An addiction, like alcoholism or some others, is really a human invention to avoid pain that is intolerable, maybe not consciously but is felt by the psyche and the unconscious to be unbearable. There's nothing so distracting as an addiction. It serves very well; if you're occupied with your addiction, you don't have to think of the pain of the reality. Hence the cure is going to have to be some kind of deep therapy.

This is what the Divine Therapist offers in the Inner Room. This is why all of the great teachers of the Christian and the eastern religions emphasise the importance of a

practice in which one deliberately takes time every day to work with one's deep wounds. What Jesus is offering is not just to work on those wounds like a doctor, but to work on them with someone who loves you, in whom you can place your uttermost confidence. These emotional programmes secretly influence the most serious decisions of life, until we enter the spiritual journey and face them and undertake a programme as focused as meditation and contemplative prayer are. Remember, this is not your idea! It's an invitation coming from Jesus Christ to you and to me.

6

The Process of Divine Therapy

There are two things occurring in the Inner Room when we agree to go there, the divine office of the Therapist who is God. There, having closed the door on our own thoughts & self-reflections, we begin over time to identify with Christ's experience of the Father as Abba. You put yourself in the way of divine love by giving God your whole being, attention, intention, and your personhood, past and future during those few minutes that you give yourself to this presence. In the course of time, the Divine Therapy works very realistically, concretely and practically with our particular wounds and the damage done to us in early childhood, knowingly or unknowingly by others and the damage we've done to ourselves when we came to the age of reason. We've spoken about how deeply the emotional programmes for happiness leading to the development of the false self and over-identification with our group affects our decisions and our behaviour, how much our cultural conditioning enters into the way we think or see things and how we react to other people, and how we plan our future lives.

When we start frequenting the Inner Room through regular practice, the chief discipline is to discontinue the deliberate thinking about anything that characterises our ordinary psychological awareness. When we stop thinking about something particular, the imagination which is a perpetual motion faculty, starts suggesting some things to think about, some things that we may have wanted to talk about for a long time. As soon as we are quiet and haven't a deliberate train of thought, along comes the suggestions from the past or our memory or from external sensations that we pick up in the group or wherever we are meditating. We find ourselves then constantly bombarded with thoughts that we don't want. This itself is very aggravating but it also is humbling. Some people have told me they had no idea how much junk went through their head until they tried to be quiet for a minute. To shut your mouth is easy but to shut off the interior dialogue is quite a job and it can't be done by force. So it has to be done gradually, by developing freedom from the interest that we have in various forms of thought that come down the stream of consciousness. We try to be still and silent and wait on the Lord and be open to the divine presence and values in which we are immersed when we are in the Inner Room.

The affirmation of our basic goodness is the first thing the Divine Therapist tends to emphasise. Not everybody but most people will experience a certain spring time of the spiritual journey, a certain fervour, or excitement in discovering new things about God that arise through liturgical participation, reading the scripture, maybe some light ministry. Actually the beginning of the spiritual journey is not the right time for a lot of ministry because the first person who needs to be ministered to turns out to be ourselves. We need to be established in this prayer before we start doing so much volunteer work that we don't have any time for prayer. We say, "Well I'm doing good work so I don't need the Inner Room." You need the Inner Room all the more if you are inclined to substitute good works for the period of silent waiting upon God and

allowing ourselves to realise the value of our being rather than what we do. That has value too, but not as much as the deepening of the experience of our true self which can be identified with the inmost being. That's where we participate in God's presence and in some sense is identified with God who dwells at the centre or within the true self.

When our confidence in God reaches a certain point, then God begins to do the other aspect of the Inner Room, which is to bring to our attention the undigested emotional material of a lifetime, beginning usually with what is closest to the time of our conversion, and kind of working back over time through each level of our human life until it comes to earliest childhood.

In the Near East and elsewhere they have what they call "tells". A tell is a series of civilisations one built on another. Apparently in those days, if your town was conquered by an enemy, they just burnt it down and on the remains they built one of their own. So you have civilisations that are stacked one on top of the other with the covering of earth and trees that time has provided. So the tell is something like this, a kind of lump on the horizon. It's an archaeologist's delight because it means all in one place they can dig down and make a thorough investigation of all the kinds of cultures and people who lived in that territory from the beginning of historical time. So, if you were an archaeologist, you would obviously clean off the top first. Then you would come to the first level of civilisation, and you would gather the nice pottery & send it to the British Museum or you would throw it on the dump if it were just rocks that were broken and so on. Then, you would take a vacation. A year later when the archaeological season resumes, you would bring some students from the University of Pennsylvania or some place. You would start digging again down to the next civilisation and then again the same process. You save what is useful and you throw out what is junk. Well, this goes on year after year until you finally get back to the earliest civilisations and finally you come to the bottom of the pile which is the stone age I suppose. Then the archaeologists go off & look for another tell.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the Inner Room is somewhat similar. It may seem to be very disorganised and unpredictable. But, there is a certain method and actually an enormous amount of wisdom in this process. So God takes us where we are and this is the springtime of the spiritual journey. In other words, when the top of the pile has been cleared away, then comes the real work of digging through the whole history of our personal life beginning where you were converted. Now if you were converted at mid-life then you experience the advantages and disadvantages of the mid-life crisis.

What does the Spirit do? He saves whatever was good in that period of our personal history, and he invites us to let go of the junk of undue influences in our life. So he works from, let us say, through the mid-life crisis to late adulthood, early adulthood, adolescence, late childhood, early childhood and infancy.

Each time he goes down he preserves what is good and throws out what was not good. So our psychological experience is going to be that as God's Spirit searches the deep things of our hearts, he eventually comes to early childhood where most of our problems began in the first place, the traumatic emotions that led to over-identification with some particular emotion or programme for happiness like control or security.

As you progress in the spiritual journey, in the work of the Inner Room, what is going to be your psychological experience is that you are getting worse. You are not

getting worse. You are just finding out how bad you always were. This is liberating information because you now know that you are not bad at all but you just suffered from what everybody suffers, namely the human condition and the struggle to find a means of surviving in that fragile age. All you have got to work with basically are the instinctual needs of security, power and control, affection and esteem. Because you are an infant and don't have the use of reason to modify your desires, they become fantastic, unlimited, extraordinary, then fossilised as the years go by, complexified in the socialisation period from 4 to 8 and so on when we unquestioningly accept the values of our group, parents, ethnic group, nationality, religion and so forth. In other words, we buy into and objectify all the boundaries and divisions that our ancestors in their frantic attempt to find happiness made. We inherit all their mistakes. Until this day, humanity hasn't grown up very much and is constantly regressing to earlier stages of evolution. For instance, ethnic issues are basically tribal issues and tribal issues are basically the mentality of a child of 2 or 3 years of age. So there is nothing admirable about ethnic loyalties. It's like a group of children with their own little myth pretending that their castles by the sea that they build and which the water washes away during the day are sacred. They aren't. They are just a creation of children.

In the Gospel then, Jesus relentlessly subverts the ethnic and religious exaggerations or presuppositions or pre-packaged values that he had inherited in his culture. He frequently and vigorously undermines their credibility and indeed sometimes pokes fun at them. Paul sums up this scriptural wisdom when he says "In Christ there is no longer Jew or Gentile" (nationalistic differences), "there is no longer male or female" (gender differences), "there is no longer slave or free" (social differences), "but we are all one in Christ." It is precisely the false-self system that gives us the illusion that we are separated. We aren't. At the deepest level we remain one. The differences that we see in one another is simply God's love of diversity manifesting itself.

So in this Inner Room these things have to be found out and we need instruction in them. Then in daily life one needs to gradually carry out the consequences of this developing wisdom or the values of the Gospel.