

Meditation: The Purification of Love from the “Ground up”

IN THE EVENING at all events you must take a portion of Holy Scripture with you in your thoughts to bed, which you may ruminate like a clean animal, and go softly to sleep. But it ought not to be much, but rather quite a small portion, thoroughly well-pondered and understood; and when you rise in the morning you shall find it as a bequest from yesterday.”

How many readers will recognize that we have here before us a saying of Luther about meditation? He writes it to the pastor in his “*ratio vivendi sacrorum*” (how priests ought to live). In this saying, as often in Luther’s writings, two periods of time meet. From his Catholic past he had still a connection with meditation, which was practiced very earnestly in the monasteries. But in this saying a comfortable bourgeois Christianity also reveals itself, which afterwards became the danger of Protestantism. Not much can be felt in it of the heroic effort, which distinguishes every real meditation. Luther indeed knew this heroic effort especially in prayer. But still, it is quite obvious that something else pushes its way in.

And yet the figure of rumination is noteworthy, although the sphere from which it is taken is lowly. In meditation a saying or a picture is actually permeated with the substance of our own human being, and permeates us with the substance of its own being. The more strongly we are able to meditate, the more does the latter permeation occur. A spiritual process of taking in takes place.

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It is the same process as in Luther’s picture, only upon a higher plane. Therefore many a figure like this can reveal exactly the right way to meditate. And when one adds “thoroughly well-pondered and understood,” that also is something which belongs to true meditation.

Luther’s summons was not, certainly, the impulse to a new age of meditation. But many a one who has loved, and who still loves, evangelical Christianity in its best form may be helped by the indication that we in this place see a new religious age growing out of Luther, which Luther himself could not bring in, but to which there was an approach in him. With the phrase “ruminating like a clean animal,” Luther

calls already to the far-off Darwin. Instead of it one must say “penetrated with being, like an angel” and one would then call up a new age.

Here let us go into the question which a young reader of these letters who has power in meditation asks, namely, whether meditation immediately on awakening from sleep is not dangerous, because man in a horizontal position is quite different from man in an upright position. Being more in a state of metabolism, of change and repair in his system, in this position he may indeed easily have spiritual experiences, but they come in a dreamlike way out of his lower life system. This danger is certainly there, and it is good to be aware of it. In ancient India this would have been still more clearly felt. But the result of European [occidental] development is such that man becomes to a high degree independent of outward things, and also of his bodily position. The question is simply *if one is able* to meditate strongly in a spiritual way when lying down. And it is a fact of experience that it is possible to do so, though in most cases not without practice and effort. One will notice oneself that it is a help if one at least lays one’s head higher, without bringing oneself out of the spiritual mood of the night. Especially, in so far as one wants to bring the deeper experiences of the night into one’s consciousness, it will be well not to change the bodily position too much. Let each seek to find out what is possible for him. In any case, the right thing is that the meditation should take place, not in a consciousness below the level of the daily consciousness, but in a stronger, more awakened, clearer consciousness than the everyday consciousness, or that it should lead into such a consciousness. And to what degree the human consciousness can become clear and spiritual, one has at first no idea.

This is above all true for the meditations to which we are now coming. If the seven “I ams” were above all a sanctifying of thought, we now turn especially to the sanctifying of feeling. What is taking place today to ennoble human feeling? Much is done unconsciously by art. And it would be possible, from the great works of art to build up a system of self-training similar to that which we have just built up out of John’s Gospel. He who would daily allow the Sistine Madonna of Raphael, in color if

possible, to work upon him for five minutes, would be completely changed in three years. The pure divine-humanity of this picture—one can call it nothing else—would pour its essence into him.

If pictures have a very strong action upon the life of feeling, yet the strongest pictures, those that act most powerfully, are the occurrences which the gospels afford us in the form of the acts of Christ. No master in the world has ever painted them worthily. We shall have clearly recognized this at the end of our studies. But it is perhaps good that we must ourselves inwardly picture these scenes. They thus become freer, more stirring, more personal and still richer in mystery than if a master had first passed them through his soul for us.

By nothing can our life of feeling be more cleansed, changed, made divine, than when we go the old well-trod way through the seven last stations of Christ’s perfecting. But we go this way quite differently from the medieval monks. In the cloisters, before one plunged into the sorrows and resurrection of Christ, one had first for twelve weeks to allow the twelve preceding chapters of John’s Gospel to act upon one. In them, the first five “I ams” were contained. But it is something different when one has first conquered the “I” for oneself, as we have sought to do. One remains then more protected against what is merely feeling, and enters much more into what is spiritual.

Simply because free thinking was still dulled, Christian feeling in the Middle Ages was developed to a height which was marvelously great and pure. That was exactly the task of this period of history. If we wish not to lose this, but to win it anew, it can only proceed today from the awake, conscious, strong “I,” which the new age has made possible. In this way the whole life of feeling receives another character, a greater spirituality and an inclusiveness of the world.

If we look at our life of feeling, we soon see clearly that it is very much in need of cleansing and of self-training. And out of the feeling proceeds the will. Although the life of feeling seems to be very much our own individual possession, entirely shut up in ourselves, yet it is just as much the mother earth from which our whole life grows up. A soul which is filled with noble feeling, if these feelings

are healthy and strong, does not need to trouble about leading a good life.

Now a man might train his inner life by taking one feeling after another and to some extent visualizing it. But it is much more profitable and surer to guide powerful new feelings into the soul, and let them wash away or wash through what is already there. Even to him, to whom Christ is not yet what he is to us, the passion of Christ will bring that reverence which makes it possible to go with Christ in some wise.

The new feeling which has come into the world through Christianity is called *Love*. Let one only read writings of pre-Christian times and notice that his sun had simply not yet risen. Even in Buddhism, in its benevolent kindness to all creatures, there is only the first red of the morning. But love has entered into the souls of men in such a way that it has intermingled with everything which was already there. And so it has itself become clouded, so that it is scarcely recognizable. That is true of very much which is called "Christian Love." Often enough to-day one has the impression that it is not Christian love which has changed hearts, but that hearts have changed Christian love. Often it is a false zeal for proselytizing which takes no heed of another's freedom, and so neither sees nor reaches his real ego; often a sentimental feeling which only spoils the word "love" for men. Sometimes it is a new kind of occupation, in which a man is really escaping from himself; sometimes, also, an evil curiosity which pushes itself into everything. Not seldom it is a slavish losing of one's self, which one then calls "selfless devotion"; not seldom also an assertion of one's self, in which, under the name of Christlikeness, one wishes to have all men the same as oneself. It is sad to observe how, under the mask of Christian love, the most hateful egotism spreads itself abroad, and never thinks of putting itself into other men's place, much less of dying into them. Nothing today more requires thorough cleansing than Christian love itself.

The high, pure spirit of the love of Christ has as yet been scarcely seen or felt. And yet, just in respect of love, Christ has most deliberately and most clearly given definite teaching, as if he had



La Vista Church of Christ

The Good Samaritan

Love is a doing, a demonstrating. The parable of the Good Samaritan contains "a whole catechism of love," which is told not in the form of teaching, but as a picture, as an action.

foreseen all the dangers of which we are speaking. We need only think of how seldom He takes the word *love* into His mouth, and in what connection He then uses it. How, when love is the subject of the talk, He at once tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, the parable in which is contained a whole catechism of love, but tells it not in the form of teaching, but as a picture, as an action. Or how He Himself, at the end of His life, before He speaks of love itself as of a new commandment for His disciples, gives as practical instruction to His disciples themselves the *Washing of the Feet*.

All this may help us to draw near with right attention to the first station of Christ's way. Here again, as we have done up till now, we shall not enter too much into the details of the building up of the meditation, but will only give hints. Thus the individual is left free to build up meditation as he chooses. And he will have his own experiences and find his personal way. If, as some would like, we carried out

the suggestions into their exact details, the reader would have difficulty in getting away from the details, would experience a kind of stereotyping of the pictures, and would not so easily make them entirely his own, so that they can develop further in a living way. The reader cannot be spared the trouble of doing this. But this advice may be given: that one should first place the story of the Washing of the Feet (John 13:1-35) before one's soul in a living way and take it into oneself. It is given to us for this purpose. With all its details, the narrator has stamped it upon his own soul: Jesus rose, laid aside His upper garment, took a towel and girded Himself. So was the Master dressed like a slave. All these details have gradually become significant and transparent for the evangelist.

But all the details ought only to lead on to the great chief event, to the wonderful spirit of service, which there reveals itself in Christ. If one has penetrated to a lively feeling of this spirit, one may represent to oneself that one is breathing this spirit in, as one drinks in the air when one breathes deeply. According to the investigations of spiritual science, feeling is most nearly connected with the so-called "middle man," with the man who lives above all in the "rhythmic" system of the lungs and heart. One can indeed with this very meditation on feeling go actually through all the five senses, raising them all to a higher plane. In the Jesuit exercise, the *exercitia spiritualia* of Ignatius Loyola, hell is experienced in all the senses successively, as one first sees in imagination the torment of the damned, then hears their crying, then smells the smoke, and so on. But here, in such meditations as the foot-washing, one can really perceive heaven as with higher senses. And one is not obliged to think that one must have first passed separately through hell if one is to become fully capable of receiving heaven, but with heaven one experiences a hell at the same time, as far as one carries it within oneself, the being in which evil rages, the being which is certainly not heaven.

When one has first made the picture of the Washing of the Feet clear for the spiritual eye, then one may seek to receive the being of Christ with the spiritual ear as a marvellous sound, then to breath in the smell of the sacrifice, then—as in the biblical

saying: "Taste and see how gracious the Lord is"—to experience the taste of such an action as if with the tongue, and lastly, to touch the act quite concretely and spiritually and pass into the warm feeling of its life. All this requires practice. But then it gives to man a living impression of a higher world, in which his senses also change. We say this here as being applicable to all meditations on pictures, and now turn again to the picture before which we are standing.

As a motto beneath the Washing of the Feet stands the saying in the Bible: "The princes of this world exercise dominion—but the Son of Man is come not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many"; only that in the place of "Son of Man" in Matthew's Gospel, in the sense of John's Gospel the word "I" might be placed, "I am come not to be ministered unto but to minister."

In such a word as this, Christ places Himself over against Caesar, who, at the same point of time in the world's history, appeared in the world to rule it. If we think of this coincidence in time, we begin to see that the ego, as it has to develop in the world, sees before itself two ways—either the way through warfare to power, or the way through freedom to love. Christ and Caesar are opposed to each other until the end of the days and fight for the ego of man. This historic warfare is waged on our behalf also. The saying of Christ just quoted contains a final historic decision and a challenge to Caesar which could not be more evident. In this decisive opposition we have in a sublime way the same thing which, perhaps out of the mysteries, was represented to men as the opposition between heavenly and earthly love. And one can find this struggle nowhere more impressively than in the history of Rome itself!

Christ has driven Caesar from his throne in Rome, but in spite of this, Caesar has again and again fallen upon Christ in Rome and driven Him away. The papacy is a battle between Caesar and Christ. Caesar, the household tyrant, the terror to subordinates, the self-asserter and self-avenger, must be rooted out of every corner of our lives. After ascending the throne, princes issue a proclamation to their peoples. Also, after Christ has ascended the throne a royal message follows to all

who are willing to belong to Him, “a new commandment give I to you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” If one actively places oneself before this decision, one has the same decision to make with the world as the Jesuits have in their placing King Lucifer in Babylon over against King Christ in Jerusalem. In its connection with the Gospels this decision is more inward and has greater content.

We do not wish to give here an exposition of the Bible, but only to create a mood as background for the meditation upon the Washing of the Feet. One ought to feel very strongly the kingliness of this love. Then love will lose the smallness, the pettiness, the slavishness which it still has in the Christian world. Christ was anxious that this kingliness should be felt, “Ye call me master and lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another’s feet.” Only he who feels this kingliness, this divineness of *Love itself*, will become quite free from that secret desire for recognition and gratitude. He knows that such love is the only possible divine attitude towards all beings. For the highest God has nothing above him, but everything under him. His life can only consist in this—that he turns to those who are under him. One has not yet any real divine life within one if one does not feel that God seeks in us also those who need help. Only in the kingdom of love does one find that God is really in us.

If through this a new kind of pride could be aroused in man as he is, a pride which would be by reason of this the more horrible, Christ does away with this pride by setting about the most humble action with this royal love, yes, by first doing this



J. James Tissot, Oil on canvas, Brooklyn Museum of Art

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

“The highest God has nothing above him, but everything under him. His life can only consist in this—that he turns to those who are under him.”

most humble act before he speaks. He does not first say: “Ye ought to love one another,” but “Ye ought to wash one another’s feet.” As if to guard for ever against all pride, He sets His example before the disciples: “That ye do as I have done to you.” In just such fine traits one feels the spirit of Christ.

“As I have done to you”—the words sound so full of meaning. Can one perhaps grasp the meaning of the whole of Christ’s deed for humanity under the figure of the Washing of the Feet? This can best be done by calling in the help of certain concepts of spiritual science. Man, through his fall, has sunk down to earth, having before been much less developed but much more spiritual. The earth, upon which he now wanders, is the place of sin. From beneath, from the earth, which has become the sphere of his life, man as a spiritual being soils himself ever more and more—even if evil did not assail him, even if it were not present in himself. And in this way also it comes about that the state of a man’s will expresses itself especially in his feet, as well as in his hands. If a man is angry, he clenches his fists and stamps his feet. In a man’s walk the state of his will is more clearly visible than he com-

monly observes. For example, there is the short, masterful step, and the weak, shambling shuffle. It is not without significance that one speaks of an “impure walk.” But Christ came to earth to help men from the very bottom upward. He heals the ground on which man goes. He heals also the feet with which he goes. Follow me! I am the Way!

As if for a sign that here are deep secrets, two quite different kinds of feet are placed in opposition to one another in the story of the Washing of the Feet. “He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.” One need only take this word in the most obvious sense of the words in the Hebrew original: “He who is my guest lifts his heel against me.” It is also a picture of Caesar. He sits at the divine table, a guest, like all the others, but in his self-exaltation he at the same time spurns the earth upon which he lives, and thus insults the spirit of the earth.

From this we understand the remarkable fact, which Rudolf Steiner mentions in his lectures on John’s Gospel, that the mystics of the Middle Ages, when they entered fully into the experience of the Washing of the Feet, really believed that they felt water poured around their feet. The modern psychologist will here have no hesitation in talking about suggestion. It may have occurred here and there. In reality, another process, which is entirely holy, is often at the bottom of this. When a man unites himself entirely to Christ, he loses this egotistical spurning of the mother earth upon which he stands. He plunges, particularly with his feet also, into an active spirituality. For only for a purely external way of thinking are the feet so unspiritual and merely corporeal, as one today considers them. In them man is united to strong earth forces which he can feel especially in them.

Since Christ has been present in earthly being, these earth forces can be entirely Christianized, can entirely become agents through which the spirit of Christ can work. The picture of this is given in the vision of Christ in the Revelation of John. Christ

Himself appears there with feet like molten brass: the strongest of earth forces with the fire of love glowing through them. These mystics experienced the beginning of this; and the men of today can experience it. Then one has the experience of purification from the “ground up.”

Some will at first be able only to listen to such evidence. They may, indeed, guess from it that such Biblical pictures contain nothing that is accidental, even in their details. If one surrenders oneself to them, one has not only religious moral experiences in the heart, but goes towards a new world.

But first of all everyone can hear out of the story itself the voice of Christ—Love means to wash the feet, to take man in his earthly circumstances, and through this deed to help him upwards from beneath. It is still child-like to imitate Christ’s example outwardly, as the kings of Bavaria on Holy Tuesday collected some old men in

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the royal palace, and poured water over their feet—which had been thoroughly cleansed beforehand. It was better when in the Middle Ages certain communities really celebrated the washing of the feet as a sacrament. It is best of all if we, at moments when we have an opportunity of showing love, let this picture arise before our souls: Washing of the Feet—that is the great act of Christ Himself. That is His divine example. We shall then come to have quite other thoughts than if we were wishing to have love as a pleasing feeling in our hearts. From below upwards, to sanctify men from the ground upwards through the act of service: that is Christian love. Many orders of monks in the past had exercises in humility. But the wonderful word *humility* has many stains on it today. We must win it back as a royal will to serve.

If this will lives in us, then we may always strengthen and inspire it again from the picture of Christ, from the example of the Washing of the Feet. Let us then, after we have brought about a right feeling inwardly from a study of the details,

look solely at the principal feature, Christ as, in this divine will to serve, He washes men's feet—*men's* feet. Let us drink into ourselves this will, this frame of mind, till we are filled with it—if possible so strongly that we think that now through all eternity nothing else could live in us.

During this exercise and the following exercises of this second group, we may feel our ego, as we have gained it from the first group of exercises, to be at last exactly like the vessel of the Grail, which lets itself be filled from above with the noblest content, with the life-blood of Christ himself. It is not that we should outwardly enter a fellowship of the Grail and play with thoughts of the Grail, but that we should inwardly gain the experience of the Grail. The ego can, like an inverted ves-



sel, shut itself off from above, and overshadow others below; then it becomes a Caesar. Whether a greater Caesar or a less, depends upon its gifts. The ego can also open itself towards what is above, and give itself as an offering to what is beneath; then it becomes a disciple of Christ. John the Baptist stood at the door to new things; the ego felt itself lonely and empty and called for content. Then came Christ and said, "I am," and now we take into ourselves the essential content of this "I am." That is the experience of the

Grail.

Here one sees clearly indeed that this has nothing to do with "mystical" feeling, as one understands mysticism today, but is a fundamental form of training for man as man requires it today. □

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