

"There must be no theology of liberation without the glorification of God and no glorification of God without the liberation of the oppressed."

Jurgen Moltmann

The worship of God is at the heart of the life of the church. It is in worship that we are caught up in the life of God and receive the vision of God. Worship serves as a constant purification of our understanding of God. In this way it confronts our idolatries and exposes them to rigorous critique. Moltmann acknowledges that worship of God is central in our life as a Christian community, providing the context of devotion and inspiration for our common life. He wants to insist that with worship there will be a turning both toward God and toward the world, its pain and suffering. The worship of God is the worship of the God who is concerned for the vulnerable and the imprisoned.

"If spirituality which cuts itself off from the political becomes escapist, social and political movements apart from spirituality become anti-human and ultimately totalitarian."

Kenneth Leech

There has been a tendency for spirituality to retreat from the world, believing that the world is contaminated and needs to be abandoned. However, the Christian conviction is that God loves the world even in its chaos. The danger is for politics to be isolated from spirituality. When this happens the cause can become all consuming and the end justify the

means. Kenneth Leech reminds us of the need for spirituality to nurture our political engagement and for politics to inform spirituality.

"Social action without prayer is soulless: but prayer without action lacks integrity... With increasing frequency, people are accepting as the theological task of our epoch, the integration of action and contemplation."

Walter Wink

In our minds prayer and action can seem unrelated. We can easily think that prayer is focused on the inner life - action on the life of the world. Walter Wink is appealing for the true relation between prayer and action to be recovered. Prayer and action need each other. When they are separated they lose their power to influence the other. So for Wink, prayer does not isolate, but rather reveals to us the ways we are called to be present as agents of healing in the world. He claims that to pray without being willing to act, is simply evasion. Equally, action without prayer can lose its direction and contact with the Spirit of God.

"Without engagement or social consciousness, contemplation runs the danger of becoming disembodied interiority. Without contemplation engagement may mean merely restless activity or another idolatry."

Philip Sheldrake

Many different voices are calling for a creative relationship between contemplation and action. Refining the way we see the world, coming to see the world through grace-healed eyes, detecting the work of the Spirit is described as contemplation. This will draw us to engage with the world. Sheldrake warns us to avoid engagement without contemplation. Without discernment action can become simply the working out of our own agendas.

"We have been asked to choose whether we are interested in prayer or social action, transcendence or immanence, tradition or relevance, orthodoxy or ethicalism ... It is time to refuse to make any such choice..."

Urban T. Holmes

Holding together each of these aspects of faith can be a challenge. Our personalities will be drawn one way or the other. But when we jettison one dimension and hold only to the other, then our faith will be distorted. Refusing the choice can be a difficult place to be. It can suggest that we are out of tune with current emphases. But choosing between these dimensions can find us out of touch with resources that our faith can offer.

"Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing an apostolic work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect.

As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself. And there too a great deal has to be gone through, as gradually you struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. The range tends to narrow down, but it gets much more real. In the end ... it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything.

..As for the big results, these are not in your hands or mine, but they can suddenly happen, and we can share in them: but there is no point in building our lives on this personal satisfaction, which may be denied us and which after all is not that important...

The great thing, after all, is to live not to pour out your life in the service of a myth: and we turn the best things into myths. If you can get free from the domination of causes and just serve Christ's truth, you will be able to do more and will be less crushed by inevitable disappointments. The real hope ... is not in something we think we can do, but in God who is making something good out of it in some way we cannot see."

Thomas Merton - Letter to Jim Forest

Sources:

Urban T. Holmes, *Realities and Visions*

Kenneth Leech, *The Social God* p. 29

Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* p. 8

Philip Sheldrake, *Images of Holiness* p. 97

Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* p. 306

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"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10