Prelude

Change Your Way of Seeing

Christianity is, above all, a way of *seeing*. Everything else in Christian life flows from and circles around the transformation of vision. Christians *see* differently, and that is why their prayer, their worship, their action, their whole way of being in the world have a distinctive accent and flavor. What unites figures as diverse as James Joyce, Caravaggio, John Milton, the architect of Chartres, Dorothy Day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and the later Bob Dylan is a peculiar and distinctive *take* on things, a style, a way, which flow finally from Jesus of Nazareth. Origen of Alexandria once remarked that holiness is seeing with the eyes of Christ, Teilhard de Chardin said, with great passion, that his mission as a Christian thinker was to help people *see*, and Thomas Aquinas said that the ultimate goal of the Christian life is a "beatific vision," an act of *seeing*.

In the strange and strikingly beautiful account of the healing of the man born blind in John's Gospel, we find an iconic representation of this coming to see. Jesus spits on the ground and makes a mud paste which he then rubs onto the man's eyes. When the man washes his eyes in the pool of Siloam as Jesus had instructed him, his sight is restored. The crowds are amazed, but the Pharisees — consternated and skeptical — accuse him of being naive and the one who healed him of being a sinner. With disarming simplicity the visionary responds: "All I know is I was blind, and now I see." This is precisely what all Christians say when they have encountered the light of Christ. It was St. Augustine who saw in the making of the mud paste a metaphor for the Incarnation: the divine power mixing with the earth, resulting in the formation of a healing balm. When this salve of God made flesh is rubbed onto our eyes blinded by sin we come again to see.

This book is about coming to vision through Christ. It is about the transformative power of the rich, complex, and variegated tradition that flows from Jesus of Nazareth, the enfleshment of God.

But what is it precisely that Christians see, and how do they come to see it? What is the "mystical" sense which stands stubbornly at the heart of all Christian experience? To answer these questions, I recommend that we turn to the first chapter of the earliest Gospel, that of Mark. After his baptism and temptation in the desert, Jesus goes into Galilee and begins to preach. The first words out of his mouth, as Mark reports them, serve as a sort of summary statement of his life and work: "The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News" (Mark 1:15).

The moment has arrived, the privileged time, the *kairos;* something that human beings have been longing for and striving after and hoping to see has appeared, and the time is now for a decision, for action. Jesus' very first words are a wake-up call, a warning bell in the night, a summons to attention. This is not the time to be asleep, not the time to be languishing in complacency and self-satisfaction, not the time for delaying tactics, for procrastination and second guessing. In the Byzantine liturgy, we find the oft-repeated call to "be attentive," and in the Buddhist tradition, there is a great emphasis placed on wakefulness. In the fiction of James Joyce, we often find that moments of spiritual insight are preceded by a great thunderclap, the cosmic alarm shocking the characters (and the reader) into wide-awakenness. The initial words of Jesus' first sermon are a similar invitation to psychological and spiritual awareness: there is something to be seen, so open your eyes!

But what is it that he wants us to notice? What is this astonishing state of affairs that must not be missed? "The Kingdom of God is close at hand." Now there have been libraries of books written on the subject of the "Kingdom," some suggesting that it refers to a political realignment of Jewish society, others that it signals a purely spiritual condition beyond the world, still others that it points to a change of heart in the individual. To my mind, the metaphor of the Kingdom, in

its poetic richness, is legitimately open to all of those interpretations, but it has a primary referent *in the person of Jesus himself.* Jesus wants us to open our eyes and see *him,* more to the point, to see what God is doing in and through him. He himself *is* the Kingdom of God coming into the world with transformative power.

In Jesus of Nazareth, the divine and the human have come together in a salvific way, and this reconciliation *is* the long awaited Kingdom of God. Though there are many themes that run through the Hebrew Scriptures, there is one motif that is consistent and persistent: the passionate and aching desire for deliverance, the cry of the heart toward the God from whom the people feel alienated. If only the power of rebellion and sin were ended and the friendship of God and human beings reestablished, peace, *shalom,* all-pervasive well-being would reign. What Jesus announces in his first sermon in the hills of Galilee, and what he demonstrates throughout his life and ministry, is that this wild desire of his ancestors, this hope against hope, this intimate union of God and humanity, is an accomplished fact, something which can be seen and heard and touched.

Now the Gospel writers agree that the Kingdom of God, the enfleshment of the divine life in human form, the Incarnation, *is not something to be admired from the outside, but rather an energy in which to participate.* This is, tragically, one of the most overlooked dimensions of Christian thought and experience. If we open our eyes and see the light, we too often stop at the point of admiration and worship, lost in wonder at the strange work that God has accomplished uniquely in Jesus of Nazareth. But Jesus nowhere in the Gospels urges his followers to worship him, though he insistently calls them to *follow* him. One of the surest ways to avoid the challenge of the Incarnation, one of the most effective means of closing our eyes, is to engage in just this sort of pseudo-pious distantiation. But the Gospels want us, not outside the energy of Christ, but in it, not wondering at it, but swimming in it. In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as the vine *onto which we are grafted like branches,* and he compares himself to food *which we are to take into ourselves.* These beautifully organic images are meant to highlight our *participation* in the event of the Incarnation, our concrete citizenship in the Kingdom of God. It was the great medieval mystic Meister Eckhart who commented that the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth long ago is of no interest and importance unless that same word becomes incarnate in us today.[1]

We have been summoned to attentiveness, and we have heard the word announcing the coming together of the divine and human. But what is it that enables us truly to hear and respond? How can we see the light that has been so unexpectedly and suddenly turned on? Again we consult Jesus' opening speech in Mark's Gospel: "repent and believe the Good News." The word so often and so misleadingly translated as "repent" is *metanoiete.* This Greek term is based upon two words, *meta* (beyond) and *nous* (mind or spirit), and thus, in its most basic form, it means something like "go beyond the mind that you have." The English word "repent" has a moralizing overtone, suggesting a change in behavior or action, whereas Jesus' term seems to be hinting at a change at a far more fundamental level of one's being. Jesus urges his listeners to change their way of knowing, their way of perceiving and grasping reality, their perspective, their mode of *seeing.* What Jesus implies is this: the new state of affairs has arrived, the divine and human have met, but the way you customarily see is going to blind you to this novelty. In the gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus expresses the same concern: "The Kingdom of God is spread out on the earth, *but people do not see it.*" Minds, eyes, ears, senses, perceptions — all have to be opened up, turned around, revitalized. *Metanoia,* soul transformation, is Jesus' first recommendation.

But what exactly is the problem with the way we think and see? To give an adequate answer to that question we would have to work our way through the whole of the Bible and the Christian tradition, for the attempt to name and heal spiritual blindness is one of the basic motifs of our religion. But perhaps a simple answer can be given in these terms: we see and know and perceive with a mind of fear rather than with a mind of trust. When we fear, we cling to who we are and what we have; when we are afraid, we see ourselves as the threatened center of a hostile universe, and thus we violently defend ourselves and lash out at potential adversaries. And fear — according to so many of the biblical authors and so many of the mystics and theologians of our tradition — is a function of living our lives at the

surface level, a result of forgetting our deepest identity. At the root and ground of our being, at the "center" of who we are, there is what Christianity calls "the image and likeness of God." This means that at the foundation of our existence, we are one with the divine power which continually creates and sustains the universe; we are held and cherished by the infinite love of God. When we rest in this center and realize its power, we know that, in an ultimate sense, we are safe, or, in more classical religious language, "saved." And therefore we can let go of fear and begin to live in radical trust. But when we lose sight of this rootedness in God, we live exclusively on the tiny island of the ego, and lives become dominated by fear. Fear is the "original sin" of which the church fathers speak; fear is the poison that was injected into human consciousness and human society from the beginning; fear is the debilitating and life-denying element which upsets the "chemical balance" of both psyche and society.

To overcome fear is to move from the *pusilla anima* (the small soul) to the *magna anima* (the great soul). When we are dominated by our egos, we live in a very narrow space, in the *angustiae* (the straits) between this fear and that, between this attachment and that. But when we surrender in trust to the bearing power of God, our souls become great, roomy, expansive. We realize that we are connected to all things and to the creative energy of the whole cosmos. Interestingly, the term *magna anima* shares a Sanskrit root with the word *mahatma,* and both mean "great soul." What Jesus calls for in *metanoia* is the transformation from the terrified and self-regarding small soul to the confident and soaring great soul. The seeing of the Kingdom, in short, is not for the pusillanimous but for the magnanimous.

In that wonderful story of the calming of the storm at sea, we witness some of the spiritual dynamics of fear and trust. Making their way across the lake in their tiny boat, the disciples stand symbolically for all of us journeying through life within the confines of the fearful *pusilla anima.* When they confront the storm and the mighty waves, they are immediately filled with terror, convinced that they are going to drown. Similarly, when the trials and anxieties of life confront the ego, the first reaction is fear, since the ego is fundamentally persuaded that there is nothing "under" it or "behind" it, no power beyond itf upon which it can rely. In the midst of this terrible *Sturm und ang,* this inner and outer tension, Jesus, Mark tells us, is "asleep a cushion," that is, utterly at peace, centered, at rest. Jesus stands e for the divine power which is "asleep" within all of us, indeed hin the very confines of the ego. He symbolizes that divine energy ich remains unaffected by the fear-storms generated by the grasp- ego. Continuing to read the story at a spiritual level, we see that s none other than this divine power which successfully stills the rm and calms the waves: "he rebuked the wind and said to the , 'quiet now; be calm'" (Mark 4:39). This beautiful narrative seems suggest that if we but awaken to the presence of Christ within us, ve learn to live and to see at a deeper level, if we live in basic st rather than fear, then we can withstand even the most frighten- storms. When, at the close of the story, Jesus asks the bewildered l exhausted disciples, "Why are you so frightened? How is it that have no faith?" (Mark 4:41) he is wondering why they have not let go of the ego mind, the mind of fear, why they have not yet erienced the *metanoia* necessary for living in the Kingdom of God.

Thus our examination of Jesus' programmatic opening homily in rk's Gospel reveals the following: open your eyes; see the coming ether of the divine and the human; learn to live in the power of t incarnation (the Kingdom) through *metanoia,* through the chang- of your attitude, your orientation, your way of seeing. But Jesus' at speech does not end with the call to *metanoia;* rather, it explic- names the state of being in the Kingdom of God, the goal and point of the change of heart: "believe the Good News." Now like word *metanoiete,* the term *pisteuete* (believe) has been terribly mis- erstood over the centuries, coming, unfortunately, to mean the dry nt to religious propositions for which there is little or no evidence. ce the Enlightenment and its altogether legitimate insistence on onal responsibility, faith, in the sense just described, has come into epute. It seems to be the last refuge of uncritical people, those perate to find some assurance with regard to the ultimate things thus willing to swallow even the most far-fetched theories and efs. Happily, "belief" in the biblical and traditional sense of the n has nothing to do with this truncated and irresponsible rational-

ity. "To believe," as Jesus uses the term, signals, not so much a way of knowing as a way of *being known.* To have faith is to allow oneself to be overwhelmed by the power of God, to permit the divine energy to reign at all levels of one's being. As such, it is not primarily a matter of understanding and assenting to propositions as it is surrendering to the God who wants to become incarnate in us. In Paul Tillich's language, "faith" is being grasped by Ultimate Concern, permitting oneself to be shaken and turned by the in-breaking God.

Hence when Jesus urges his listeners to believe, he is inviting them, not so much to adhere to a new set of propositions, but rather to let go of the dominating and fearful ego and learn once more to live in the confidence of the *magna anima.* He is calling them to find the new center of their lives *where he finds his own,* in the unconditional love of God. One of the tragic ironies of the tradition is that Jesus' "faith," interpreted along rationalist lines, serves only to boost up the ego, confirming it in its grasping and its fear: I *have* the faith, and you don't; do I *really* understand the statements I claim to believe? The state of mind designed to quell the ego has been, more often than not, transformed into one more ego game. "Believing" the "Good News" has nothing to do with these games of the mind. It has everything to do with radical change of life and vision, with the simple (and dreadfully complex) process of allowing oneself to swim in the divine sea, to find the true self by letting go of the old center.

One of the most remarkable accounts of this conversion is the story of the healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus, in the Gospel of Mark. Physical blindness is, for Mark as well as for John, an evocative symbol of the terrible blindness of the soul which all of us sinners experience. When the *pusilla anima* reigns, when the *imago Dei* is covered over, we see within the narrow spectrum of our fearful desires. Blind Bartimaeus, sitting helplessly by the road outside of Jericho begging for alms and attention, expresses this hopeless and darkened-over state of soul. When he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is in the vicinity, he begins to cry out, "Son of David, have pity on me" (Mark 10:48). The original Greek here is *eleeson me,* beautifully reflective of the liturgical cry of the church, *Kyrie eleison,* Lord have mercy. Bartimaeus gives voice to the prayerful groaning of the whole people of God for release from the imprisonment of the small soul. Though he is reprimanded by the crowd, Bartimaeus continues to shout, until finally Jesus calls out to him. This is the summons that echoes from the very depths of one's own being, the call of the *magna anima,* the invitation to rebirth and reconfiguration.

Inspired by this voice, convinced that he has discovered the pearl of great price, the *unum necessarium,* Bartimaeus jumps up, throws off his cloak and comes to Jesus. In the early centuries of the church, those about to be baptized were invited to strip themselves of their clothes, symbolizing thereby their renunciation of their old way of life. In Mark's story, the blind man prepares for inner transformation by throwing off the cloak of his old consciousness, his old pattern of desire, the lifestyle which has rendered him spiritually blind. Then, at the feet of Jesus, Bartimaeus hears the question that all of us hear in the stillness of the heart, the question which comes from the divine power within and which subtly but firmly invites us to transformation: "What do you want me to do for you?" God beckons us, but God never compels us. Then, in one of the simplest and most poignant lines in the Scripture, Bartimaeus says, "Master, I want to see again." Desperately in the dark, hounded by the demons of desire, caught in the narrow passage of ego-consciousness, Bartimaeus wants to see with a deeper, broader, and clearer vision. In his pain, and also in his confidence, Bartimaeus stands for all of us spiritual seekers, all who hope against hope that there might be a way to live outside the tyranny of the ego. He wants precisely what we have been exploring here: a new attitude, a new perspective, the *magna anima.* And Jesus' answer to Bartimaeus, "Go, your faith has saved you," is perfectly in line with the "inaugural address" which we have been analyzing. What saves the blind man is the *metanoia* which culminates in faith, the shift in consciousness from ego-dominance to surrender. What restores the vision of the spiritual seeker is the throwing off of the old mind and the adoption, through God's grace, of a divine mind. Of course, the story ends with Bartimaeus, "following Jesus up the road." It ends, in a word, with discipleship. Once the soul has been transfigured, the only path that seems appealing is the one walked by Christ, that is to say, the path of radical self-offering, self-surrender. Fired by the God-

consciousness, in touch with the divine source within us, drinking from the well of eternal life, we are inspired simply to pour ourselves out in love.

Jesus of Nazareth embodied the Kingdom of God and made possible a new way of seeing which enabled others to enter into the energy of that Kingdom. The first Christians were those who were intoxicated by this vision and felt their lives transformed by it. The epistles of Paul and the Gospels are the first written accounts of the experience of being grasped by the power of Jesus Christ. It is terribly important to remember that they are by no means objective, disinterested narratives, biographies, or histories; rather, they are presentations of the process of *metanoia,* "showings" of how Jesus Christ changes lives and minds. What Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul do consistently is to hold up icons of the New Being, pictures of the Christ, in the hopes of affecting *metanoia* in their readers. In the spiritual traditions of the Christian East, there is great emphasis placed on the role of icons or sacred pictures. When we meditate on an icon of the Virgin or of Christ, we allow ourselves to be drawn into the "field of force" of that picture, letting the icon to work on us through a type of spiritual osmosis. There is something similar at play in the epistles and the Gospels: like the Master himself, the first Christian writers are interested, above all, in changing attitudes, in awakening faith.

In his magnificent letter to the Christians in Rome, St. Paul says: "I am not ashamed of the Good News. It is the power of God saving all who have faith" (Rom. 1:16). This is a beautiful summary of the spiritual dynamics I have been describing throughout this introduction. Paul boldly and unabashedly holds up the image of the Good News (the Kingdom of God, the coming together of the divine and human) because he realizes its enormous transformative power for those who have the vision (the faith) to see it. There is another wonderful and pithy summation of the energy of *metanoia* in Paul's letter to the Galatians: "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." The Apostle is announcing to his audience that he has experienced the *metanoia,* the shift in consciousness, brought about by contact with Jesus Christ: it is no longer the petty and fearful ego which dominates, but rather the power of Christ, the *magna anima.* When Paul speaks of justification or salvation throughout his epistles, he is referring, above all, to this reordering of the person through the power of the Incarnation.

Paul and the evangelists were the first Christian "theologians," that is, those seeking to say a *logos,* a word, about what God has done in Jesus of Nazareth. Their "words" are always in imitation of *the Word,* who is Christ himself, the embodiment of the Kingdom of God. Thus, their "theologies" are, as we have hinted, not primarily rational, philosophical investigations of the nature of God, but instead efforts in the direction of life transformation, re-presentations of the energy of the original Word. In this sense, Christian theology, in the beginning, had an unmistakably "evangelical," missionary, practical flavor.

This "metanoetic" function is perfectly evident in the theology which grew out of the New Testament tradition and flourished in the first centuries of the church. In the patristic period, the most prominent theologians were pastors, bishops, catechists, and monks — and not what we would call "academicians." No theologian of the early church was writing for an academic audience or to receive tenure or to be published in technical journals of theology. On the contrary, they were writing (to be sure, at a very sophisticated level) for the spiritual benefit of the people they were concretely serving. Theology was, like preaching and pastoral care, for the sake of salvation.

In this context, it is helpful to consider the example of Origen, the third-century catechist of the Christian church at Alexandria. This ingenious pastor and teacher speaks of theology as *theoria.* Obviously, we have derived our word "theory" from this Greek term, but we must beware of identifying the two. For the ancient Greeks, and for Origen, *theoria* designated, not abstract knowing, but rather mystical vision and contemplation, the type of seeing that awakens and sustains wonder. For these ancient thinkers, one did not engage in *theoria* in order to satisfy the curiosity of the mind, but to assuage the deepest longings of the spirit. In his homilies, his scriptural studies, and his voluminous theological works, Origen of Alexandria offers his readers a "theoretical" vision of Jesus Christ; he holds up an icon of the Lord and hopes thereby to change the souls of his audience.

St. Athanasius, the embattled and feisty fourth-century bishop of Alexandria, was the impassioned defender of the Christological formulas of the Council of Nicea. Against the powerful, numerically superior, and well-organized opposition of the Arians, Athanasius proclaimed the legitimacy of the *homoousios* teaching, the conviction that Jesus is "one in being" with the Father, fully divine. To safeguard this doctrine, Athanasius not only engaged in fierce theological polemics, but he also withstood public humiliation, exile, and the constant threat of violence. When we read the account of Athanasius's travails today, we are tempted to smile, perhaps a bit condescendingly. Why, after all, would a man go through so much simply to defend an idea, a dogma? Our confusion is the result of our profoundly truncated understanding of the nature of ideas. Athanasius did not put his life on the line for the Nicean formula simply because he thought it was a relatively adequate rational expression of Christian belief. He stood *contra mundum,* defending Nicea ferociously *because he believed that the salvation of the Christian community depended on that doctrine.* To fudge the teaching, as the Arians had, was not only to misplay a theological language game, but to compromise radically the dynamics of inner transformation in the minds and hearts of believers. Like his contemporaries and like the New Testament authors, Athanasius was convinced that "theoretical" icons have a saving power only when they are painted correctly.

St. Augustine, arguably the greatest mind in the history of the church, was the bishop of the town of Hippo in North Africa. By our standards, Hippo was a large parish, and Augustine its busy pastor, concerned with preaching, catechetics, and all the details of administration. His theological works fill several library shelves and are carefully examined today, for the most part, by students and professors of theology. But, once again, Augustine himself was not writing for such a rarefied audience. He endeavored to write "words about God" in order to move his flock closer to an *experience* of the God who is, in Augustine's own magnificent phrase, *interior intimo meo* (closer than we are to ourselves). Thus in his best known work, the *Confessions,* Augustine moves from metaphysics to poetry to psychological autobiography in an effortless rhythm. We might be puzzled by this mixing of genres, but given Augustine's wholistic sense of the purpose of theology, it is perfectly natural. He would undoubtedly be puzzled by our *inability* to see the links between ideas and life, between *theoria* and the stirring of the spirit. Even his most technical theological work, the tortuously argued and densely complex *De trinitate*, was composed in order to lure the Christian into the energies which constitute the divine power. The principal aim of the work was not the clarification of the mind, but the transformation of the spirit into a Trinitarian pattern.

Even St. Thomas Aquinas, supposedly the most "rationalist" of the medieval thinkers, remains entirely patristic in the basically spiritual orientation of his theology. If we attend carefully to the opening question of Thomas's masterpiece, the *Summa theologiae*, we find that the purpose of *sacra doctrina*, theology, is the elevation of human beings toward their final end, the contemplation of God. Aquinas also speaks of theology as a mystical participation in the intimate knowledge which God has of Godself. And how is this knowledge arrived at? It is mediated through God's perfect revelation in Jesus Christ, God's surprising, overwhelming, and unpredictable disclosure of the depth of divine love in the Incarnation. In short, theology, for Thomas, is a raising up of the human spirit to a new intensity of vision and insight through the power of Jesus Christ; it is a type of *metanoia*.

If one had asked Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, or Aquinas to distinguish between his technical theology and his "spirituality," he would have been at a loss. He would probably not even have understood the question. For the great thinkers of Christianity, from the New Testament period up through the Middle Ages, the "metanoetic" quality of theology was taken for granted. But a split between what we call today "spirituality" and "theology" began to open up sometime around the beginning of the fourteenth century, that is to say, in the period just after the death of Thomas Aquinas. Theology, words about God, became increasingly a formal academic discipline, taught alongside of law and medicine in the great universities, whereas spirituality, reflection on the experience of God in one's life, became a

more or less underground concern of monks and mystics. In their effort to find intellectual respectability, theologians endeavored to conform to the more and more objective and disinterested style of the academy, thus consciously putting aside feeling, personal commitment, the focus on conversion. It is interesting to me that, according to the general consensus, Catholic theology went into decline just after this tragic rupture occurred, deteriorating into a cold and arid scholasticism, ready-made answers for technical questions unrelated to anyone's lived experience of the faith.

It wasn't until the twentieth century that the terrible division between theology and spirituality was addressed by Catholic theologians. The thinkers associated with the controversial *nouvelle théologie* (the new theology) — Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and others — sought to return to the biblical and patristic sources that had given form to Catholic thought. And what they saw in the Bible and in the fathers was precisely the dynamic that we have been exploring: theology, not as a lifeless game of question and answer, but as seeing, as transforming, as a catalyst for soul conversion.

One of Andrew Greeley's "laws" is that whatever Catholics drop, someone else eventually picks up. Around the time of the Second Vatican Council, Catholics began dropping the language of "soul," convinced that it had unfortunate dualistic overtones, and, in accordance with Greeley's prediction, it has been picked up all over the popular culture. *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore's book dealing with the cultivation of one's depths, sat atop the *New York Times* best-seller list for months; Joseph Campbell, the comparative mythologist who has been enjoying a posthumous vogue in recent years, was an unabashed celebrator of soul. And C. G. Jung, whose thought has penetrated the culture in so many ways, wrote a book entitled *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. "Soul" has proven to be such a stubbornly useful term precisely because it names something which can be named in no other way. It refers, not to the mind alone or to the "spirit" alone or to the emotions and passions alone, but rather to the center and deepest point *of the whole person.* Soul is that point of contact with the divine, that power which is opened up through metanoia and faith. It is the "interior castle" of Teresa of Avila, the even more evocative "inner wine cellar" of Meister Eckhart and the *point vierge*, the virginal point, of which Thomas Merton speaks.

What I want to show in this book is precisely *how* theological teachings, doctrines, dogmas, and stories function "metanoetically," how they transform souls. One of the earliest and most passionate designations of Jesus in the Gospels is *Soter,* a word rendered in Latin as *salvator.* The *salvator* is the bearer of the *salus,* or health. The use of this title shows that Jesus was appreciated by his first followers as a healer, one who "salves" sin-sick people, who doctors souls. The first great theologians saw their work as an extension of this soul-healing power of Jesus of Nazareth: holding up the icon of his life, teaching, death, and resurrection has a soothing, transforming, healing effect on a disordered mind. I want to look at the teachings of theology as medicines for the deepest dimension of the human being. I want to read the great motifs of the theological tradition as expressions of what St. Bonaventure called the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (the journey of the spirit into God). I want to take the books of theology off of the dusty shelves of libraries and put them to use in service of the people of God. For it is my conviction that doctrines are powerful agents of transformation and that they have, for too long, been bottled up. It is as though we were in possession of vaccines to cure the most dreaded diseases of humankind *and refused to allow them to be used.*

Accordingly, I will look at some key theological themes of our tradition under three general headings: anthropology, doctrine of God, and Christology. Theological *anthropology* teaches us who we are in the presence of the divine, that is to say, at the level of *soul.* It analyzes the soul and learns its movements, its longings, its hopes, its typical problems, its anxieties. Just as the medical doctor studies biology in order to learn how the body functions, so the theologian or pastor studies anthropology in order to learn what makes souls sick or healthy. In the terms of our discussion, the theological anthropologist examines the dynamics of *metanoia* and awakening to faith.

The doctrine of God seeks to articulate the nature of the divine power which alone can bring healing and peace to our souls. It tries to speak of that reality which stands as the goal of our deepest longing and as the terminus of our most impassioned quest. The one who thinks about God endeavors to find the cure, the elixir, the Holy Grail, the object of "faith."

And Christology is the science which studies the coming together of the longing and its fulfillment, the reconciliation of the divine and the human, the achievement of the Kingdom of God. As such, it stands at the very center of our project. To analyze Jesus Christ is to understand the Good News in all of its concreteness and freshness, and to see with greatest clarity the height and depth, the length and breadth of the *magna anima.* To see Jesus is to know, in repentance, what is wrong with us, to glimpse, in hope, what is beautiful in us and to taste, in ecstasy, the God who summons us to union.

In the course of this study, we will range widely through the Christian tradition, drawing on authors as diverse as Dante, G. K. Chesterton, Flannery O'Connor, Thomas Aquinas, Origen, Hans Urs von Balthasar, James Joyce, William Faulkner, and Paul Tillich. We will use different styles and highlight widely divergent approaches, moving, as Augustine did, from literature to autobiography to abstract metaphysics to spirituality and back again. Some will probably find certain sections of the book more appealing than others, certain authors and approaches more congenial to their taste. With this I have no quarrel. The Christian tradition stubbornly and patiently walks around the icon of Christ, seeing it, describing it, speaking of it in various ways and with various audiences in mind, convinced that no one word, no one take, is sufficient to exhaust the "infinite richness of Christ." This book stands in that tradition and confidently adopts that pluralist style. It was John Henry Newman who said that the mind is brought to assent, not so much through any one clinching argument, but through a series of probable arguments converging and tending in the same direction. It is in accord with this "illative" approach that we proceed.

We will attempt to read the teachings of great literary, spiritual and theological figures "metanoetically," that is to say, as extensions of the healing energy contained in Jesus Christ. We shall present the Christian tradition, in its myriad manifestations, as an icon of Christ and hence as an agent for the transformation of soul and the opening up of vision.

"I was blind but now I see."

Part I

The Riven Self