

“Double-mindedness in this matter is wholly destructive of the spiritual life. Totalitarian are the claims of Christ. No vestige of reservation of 'our' rights can remain. Straddle arrangements and compromises between our allegiances to the surface level and the divine Center cannot endure. Unless the willingness is present to be stripped of our last earthly dignity and hope, and yet still praise Him, we have no message in this our day of refugees, bodily and spiritual. Nor have we yielded to the monitions of the Inner Instructor.”

No one can read Thomas Kelly's "Holy Obedience" without having everything that is placid, halfway, compromising, or apathetic within him, shaken to the depths. We wish we could include it in eternity, but a few extracts must suffice:

“Meister Eckhart (thirteenth century Parisian teacher and saint) wrote: 'There are plenty to follow our Lord half-way, but not the other half. They will give up possessions, friends and honors, but it touches them too closely to disown themselves.' It is just this astonishing life which is willing to follow Him the other half, sincerely to disown itself, this life which intends complete obedience, without any reservations, that I would propose to you in all humility, in all boldness, in all seriousness. I mean this literally, utterly, completely, and I mean it for you and for me – commit your lives in unreserved obedience to Him.

“If you don't realize the revolutionary explosiveness of this proposal, you don't understand what I mean. Only now and then comes a man or a woman who, like John Woolman or Francis of Assisi, is willing to be utterly obedient, to go the other half, to follow God's faintest whisper. But when such a commitment comes in a human life, God breaks through, miracles are wrought, world-renewing, divine forces are released, history changes. There is nothing more important now than to have the human race endowed with just such committed lives....

“This is something wholly different from mild, conventional religion which, with respectable skirts held back by dainty fingers, anxiously tries to fish the world out of the mud-hole of its own selfishness. Our churches, our meeting houses are full of such respectable and amiable people....

“There is a degree of holy and complete obedience, of joyful self-renunciation and of sensitive listening that is breathtaking. Difference of degree passes over into utter difference of kind when one tries to follow Him the second half.”

Thomas Kelly wishes to make it very clear that there

is no chance falling into such an experience as the above. There is a price to pay; there is a spiritual launching into a selfless, Spirit-filled life that is the gateway to something vitally in contrast with all that has preceded it. He writes:

“It is an overwhelming experience to fall into the hands of the living God, to be invaded to the depths of one's being by His presence, to be, without warning, wholly uprooted from all earth-born securities and assurances, and to be blown by a tempest of unbelievable power which leaves one's old proud self utterly, utterly defenseless, until one cries, “All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me” (Psa. 42:7).

Some may feel there is a bit too much of the mystic about Thomas Kelly, but he felt that divine instruction took care of this tendency to become only concerned with our own spiritual life and forget the world about us. “He plucks the world out of our hearts,” Kelly said, “loosening the chains of attachment, and He hurls the world into our hearts, where we and He together carry it in infinitely tender love.”

In the very readable lecture on “Social Concern,” Mr. Kelly was doubtless greatly influenced by an experience he had had on his knees in the great cathedral in Cologne, Germany. There, as he prayed, he says that God seemed to lay the whole congealed suffering of humanity upon his heart – a burden too terrible to be borne – but with His help bearable. But the futility of the frantic, over-organized efforts of man had no appeal to him. Of this was God's responsibility before it was his in a minute part, there was a right way to labor for his fellow-men in contrast to the wrong way being pursued to universally. He expresses it thus:

“Our task is to encourage others first to let go, to cease striving, to give over this fevered effort of the self-sufficient religionist trying to please an external deity. Count on God knocking on the doors of time. God is the Seeker, and not we alone; He is anxious to swell out our time-nows into an Eternal Now by filling them with a sense of Presence. I am persuaded that religious people do not with sufficient seriousness count on God as an active factor in the affairs of the world. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock,” but too many well-intentioned people are so preoccupied with the clatter of effort to do something *for* God that they do not hear Him asking that He might do something *through* them.”

In his article, “The Simplification of Life,” Thomas Kelly gives us this precious counsel, so needed in our materialistic age:

“Much of our acceptance of multitudes of

obligations is due to our inability to say, 'No.' We calculated that that task had to be done, and we saw no one ready to undertake it. We calculated the need, and then calculated our time, and decided maybe we could squeeze it in somewhere. But the decision was a heady decision, not made withing the sanctuary of the soul. When we say 'Yes' or 'No' to calls on the basis of heady decisions, we have to give reasons to ourselves and to others. But when we say 'Yes' or 'No' to calls on the basis of inner guidance and whispered promptings of encouragement from the Center of our life, or on the basis of a lack of any inner 'rising' of that Life to encourage us in that call, we have no reason to give, except one – the will of God as we discern it. And I find that He never guides us into an intolerable scramble of panting feverishness.”

Thomas Kelly had lived most intensively and strenuously, and this had issued in a severe attack of kidney stones in the winter of 1933-34. the following year, a frustrating nervous exhaustion curtailed his habitually active life and necessitated long periods of rest, which were interrupted only long enough for him to give his lectures.

A sudden heart attack terminated the beautiful life of Thomas Kelly on January 17, 1941. He was only forty-seven years of age. “He was not; for God took him.”

from: [They Knew Their God](#)



BIRTHDAYS & SPECIAL EVENTS IN:

June

- 2nd – Tavarus Best
- 7th – Robert Schoolfield
- 14th – Flag Day
- 15th – Father's Day
- 15th – Tom Saunders
- 16th – Brett Marcoux

NCO Kids

Monthly News



June 2014



Thomas Kelly

“For God *can* be found...” The audience was electrified by these words, coming as they did from a learned scientist and philosopher who had studied in their Quaker schools and taught in their colleges. He had been a most interesting expounder *about* the things of God. The exact approach of the rationalist had been his. Dynamic of character, jovial of disposition, forceful of personality, Thomas Kelly had been the center and life of any group in which he had found himself. But now there was a “new dimension.” From knowing about God, it was evident that he had experienced a personal encounter with Him. His face glowed. His words flowed. The people were curious; they were gripped; they were shaken and challenged as he continued:

“To you in this room who are seekers, to you, young and old who have toiled all night and caught nothing, but who want to launch out into the deeps and let down your nets for a draught, I want to speak as simply, as tenderly, as clearly as I can. For God can be found. There is a last rock for



your souls, a resting place of absolute peace and joy and power and radiance and security. There is a divine Center into which your life can slip, a new and absolute orientation in God, a Center where you live with Him and

out of which you see all of life, through new and radiant vision, tinged with new sorrows and pangs, new joys unspeakable and full of glory.”

But what had happened to Thomas Kelly, now forty-four years of age who, though no one could have guessed the fact, had only four more years in which to introduce people to that Good Shepherd Who seeks His sheep so persistently? Few, if any, seemed to know the details of that personal crisis which now caused his lips to overflow with praise and pleading. But it had happened and that was what mattered.

A study of Thomas Kelly's life would seem to indicate a genuine search for spiritual reality. This, however, was often overshadowed by his obsessive thirst for knowledge and his driving ambition to succeed. He was a born academic. “When he was at Haverford as a student,” writes Rufus Jones, his teacher at Haverford College, “he came to my house deeply moved by his first day's stirring events. He sat down in front of me, his face lighted up with radiance and he said suddenly, 'I am just going to make my life a miracle!'”

Years later, now a professor of philosophy, he delivered a series of summer lectures on “the search for reality.” And he often had young students to his home discussing the quest for “the adequate life.” Just what all this meant we can only guess; doubtless much of personal ambition was involved. His almost ruthless purpose to climb the education ladder was often much in evidence. For instance, he writes to a former teacher:

“One thing is evident: I am hopelessly committed to the life of a scholar. I'm not able to be concerned primarily in practical problems of helpfulness through organizations and classes, but find the current is irresistible in its flow to the pole of pure scholarship and research....Lael (his wife) tends to think I am selfishly acquisitive in my attitude, but I can't be anything but this kind of person, and I might as well surrender to it.”

Life had not been always easy to Thomas Kelly. Born in Eastern Ohio in 1893, his father died when the lad was only four. For six years his mother carried on the operation of the farm on which he and his sister had been born. Then, for the sake of the children, Mrs. Kelly moved into the town of Wilmington that they might enjoy a good school and later have the advantage of a Quaker college. The little family was supported by the mother doing office work in a factory. Between studying and teaching, Thomas spent some months in England toward the close of the First World War. He was a participant in a number of Friends' schemes of

benevolence, including work among German prisoners.

Before this break abroad, he had commenced a theological course at Hartford Seminary where he met his wife-to-be, Lael Macy, the daughter of a Congregation minister. The young couple moved and set up housekeeping in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that Thomas might study philosophy at Harvard University. A daughter, Lois, and a son, Richard, made the little family complete.

It is a miracle that this promising man was not so thoroughly spoiled by philosophical thinking as to become lastingly closed to a revelation from Heaven. But God knows the heart, and though Thomas delved into eastern philosophy and certainly was identified with what we would call modernism and liberalism, the Heavenly Father doubtless saw the latent spark of hunger for Himself.

His desire to know more about the learning of the East led him to accept a post between East and West. Professor Kelly seemed to have reached the height of his scholastic accomplishments in the summer of 1937, when he published the fruit of seven years of labor – his book, *Explanation and Reality in the Philosophy of Emile Meyerson*, which was well reviewed in the *Journal of Philosophy*.

Shortly after this, Thomas Kelly met God. His biographer writes, “A fissure in him seemed to close, cliffs caved in and filled up a chasm.” He wrote to Rufus Jones, “The reality of Presence has been very great at times recently.”

A passion now appeared to have gripped this man of letters, to introduce lost, struggling men and women to the One Who now had become Everything. Ordinary expressions of speech did not always afford him the language which could adequately express the great Reality that his Heavenly Father had become to him. “The Center,” “The Presence,” “The Eternal Now,” and “The Light Within” are only a few of the names Thomas applied to the One Who was all that to him and much more.

It is a striking fact that what a man is within will be indicated by who his favorite author is, or the type of person he constantly takes pleasure in talking to. Little wonder, therefore, that now Kelly's emphasis had shifted from the philosopher and the theologian, to those humble saints whose motives were transparent and whose lives breathed that simplicity which greatly aided them and others in the quest for God. Two characters who lived centuries apart chronologically and oceans apart geographically, are most frequently

mentioned with obvious admiration. These were Francis of Assisi and John Woolman.

Little wonder, too, that the friends of Professor Kelly henceforth chose proved to be the true lovers of God anywhere and everywhere. For example, concerning a visit to Germany, the summer following his great life-crisis, he writes:

“I think, for example, of a day laborer in Struttgart whom I visited recently. He knows the Presence so well. And we talked for half an hour and stood together in silence and fully understood each other. He can't even speak correct German but, oh, what a precious soul...I have had several long talks with the wife of a German who has horny hands from desperately hard work. She loves the oppressed and poor and the simple folk in a way that reminds me of St. Francis of Assisi. She knows the depths of Divine Presence, the peace and creative power that you know, and through no grace of my own, I know also. Such consecration of life is amazing.”

Among Thomas Kelly's writings, we find one of the best expositions of Christian fellowship we have ever read outside the Bible. It is a lecture entitled, “The Blessed Community.” We have space only for a choice sampling of this delightful glimpse into that relationship of the members of Christ's true Body on earth which so pleasingly surprises the newcomers into this most select society, so reminiscent of the primitive Church:

“A wholly new alignment of our personal relations appears. Some men and women whom we have known before, or whom we have noticed only as a dim background for our more special friendships, suddenly loom large, step forward in our attention as men and women whom we now know to the depths. Our earlier conversations with these persons may have been few and brief, but now we know them, as it were, from within. For we discern that their lives are already down within that Center which has found us. And we hunger for their fellowship, with a profound, insistent craving which will not be denied.

“Other acquaintances recede in significance; we know now that our relationships with them have always been nearer the surface of life....For until they, too, have become wholly God-enthralled, Light-centered, they can be only good acquaintances with whom we pass the time of day. A yearning over them may set in because of their dimness of vision, but the eye-to-eye relationship of love which binds together those who live in the Center is reserved for a smaller number.”

The old doctrine of “The Inner Light,” as taught by George Fox, became very real to Kelly. Several excerpts

from a treatise entitled “The Light Within” revealed the depth of communion with God now enjoyed by this man, once so cultured, humanly speaking, and yet so earthbound:

“Deep within us all, there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself.

“How, then, shall we lay hold of that Life and Power, and live the life of prayer without ceasing? By quiet, persistent practice in the turning of all our being, day and night, in prayer and inward worship and surrender, toward Him Who calls in the depths of our souls.”

As is always the case, new life in Christ had come at the cost of the lives and pursuits of the old life in Adam. No one had had more desire to mount the social and intellectual steps than Thomas Kelly. But now, like St. Paul, he had been crucified with Christ that a new life might be lived in and by the faith of Him “Who loved me and gave Himself for me.” We quote again from “The Light Within”:

“Positions of prominence, eminences of social recognition which we once meant to attain – how puny and trifling they become! Our old ambitions and heroic dreams – what years we have wasted in feeding our own insatiable self-pride, when only His will truly matters! Our wealth and property, security now and in old age – upon what broken reeds have we learned, when He is 'the rock of our heart, and our portion forever'!...

“Placed in coveted surroundings, recipients of honors, we count them as refuse, as nothing, utterly nothing. Placed in the shadows, we are happy to pick up a straw for the love of God. No task is so small as to distress us, no honor so great as to turn our heads....