

2451 Webb Avenue  
New York, N.Y. 10468  
May 13, 1967

Dear Tom,

Even with the de-emphasizing of clerical paternalism in the modern Church I've found it impossible to call my friend (the very controversial) Ivan Illich anything but "Father." However, since I've never met you, it becomes easier to view you as one of my "even Christians."

I spent a stimulating, comforting evening on your Mystics and Zen Masters. I especially liked the essay on the English mystics; Dame Julian is a long-time friend, I having found her when I was in college. But it is years since I've read her and it was good to be reminded of her sanity. I'm afraid that over the years I have developed a distrust of the mystics -- partly because I've viewed with alarm and anguish the experience of my four best friends from college who became contemplative nuns; one to leave the monastery after twenty years, the others bogged down in obvious psychological disturbances. I realize, of course, that this isn't a logical argument against mysticism or the contemplative life. It just points to the reforms needed today. I was happy when I read your remark that contemplatives must be open to the anguish of the world. It seems to me, especially with the nuns, that the attempt to insulate them only helps them to end up disturbed persons or petty gossips. I realize I'm writing this out of my own need to get it said rather than because I think you need to hear it! So forgive me. I think I also grew suspicious of the mystics because of what I've felt is their neuroticism (although I'm aware that I may have been projecting onto them my own use of religion as a neurotic defense.) Anyway, your book has made me do a lot of thinking -- and praying. One of my fears for us lay people in Vatican II era is that while the liturgy has become a joy and the source of a developing communal spirituality (the liturgical "experiments" we have at Fordham seem extremely meaningful for all concerned), there seems to be a diminishing of personal prayer. And yet it seems to me that has to be the answer to the crises of faith my contemporaries are experiencing (brought on partly by middle age) as well as the solution to such questions as posed by Daniel Callahan in his article "The Renewal Mess." But how to find one's way back to it? I'm reading the Bible, hoping there to find the way... Please pray for me.

How is it you don't include the Spanish Mystics? The Oriental elements in St. John of the Cross seem obvious, but are they quite without significance for Zen?

Your kind letter about my book makes me very grateful. I'm so glad you felt compassion for Cardinal Spellman; that's exactly what I felt when I wrote the book. The anti-room about the bomb is properly chilling and Emil's illustrations are just right. Thanks so much for it.

In the love of Christ,  
Dorothy