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THE CONTEMPLATIVE PSYCHOLOGY OF GERALD GORDON MAY (1940–2005)

Abstract. This article presents a diversity of major psychospiritual concepts in the works of Gerald Gordon May (1940–2005), half-brother on the renowned existential psychologist Rollo May. Unlike his brother, Gerald May has not penetrated the thought-provoking mainstream psychology of religion and spiritual theology. In the present text, we attempt to indicate some possible reasons for this, while also presenting him as a unique and insightful interdisciplinary author, exceptionally linking psychology and spiritual theology whose ideas were probably too advanced to be well accepted in his time. In order to argue in favor of this thesis separately from his diagnosis of the misuse of spirituality in contemporary society, the cornerstones of May's contemplative psychology will be presented under headings such as unitive experiences, spiritual longing, and, their fruit, spiritual surrender.

Keywords: spiritual theology; psychology; unitive experience; spiritual longing; spiritual surrender.

In every century, in every decade, there are certain humble, yet larger than life figures in the history of humankind that quickly and quietly get forgotten due to the ever-present infatuation of researchers with “cutting-edge” publications. Some of these forgotten giants in their fields contributions finally dissolve into a fabric of what we call the common knowledge of humanity so that we seem to recognize some of these conceptions as coming from our own thought process and thus being our own. At times, we also tend to think that the most recent publications are the only ones that can help solve our contemporary problems. And yet, the life and work of Gerald Gordon May has not grown old – nor should it.

May's ideas normally do not appear either in or among mainstream text-

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books in the field of the psychology of religion and spiritual theology with the exception of an isolated mention of his work on the concept of Dark Night of the Soul in spirituality. The reasons for this may be multifold. One may be that May's situation bears a resemblance to what happened to Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology. Jung somehow became very difficult to identify, sometimes seeming to be more of a psychoanalyst and yet to others, more of a theologian. One can also see some similarities in the reception given to Victor Emil Frankl's works. What sets May apart is that he was far more concerned with and captivated by Christian mysticism than either Jung or Frankl.

Although May began his career as a psychiatrist, he ended up as a spiritual author and theologian mindful of his psychiatric past. His psychological views most probably seem too spiritual for psychologists and his theological views too psychologized and too universal for theologians. In fact, May attempts to reconcile these opposites and does it in an excellent manner.

Since not much has been said about May so far, I try to illustrate the core ideas of May's contemplative psychology which have a great potential for further research in both psychology of religion and spiritual theology. A general presentation of May's diagnosis of spirituality's role in contemporary society is followed by a more detailed presentation of May's understanding of spiritual experiences and their foundation in the spiritual longing present in every human heart. I will conclude with a characterization of the key concept of May's contemplative psychology which is spiritual surrender.

1. LIFE AND WORK

Gerald Gordon May was born on June 12, 1940 in Hillsdale, Michigan as the half-brother of the well-known existential psychologist, Rollo May (1909–1994), who was 30 years older than Gerald.¹ Gerald did his undergraduate work at Ohio Wesleyan University, where he graduated in 1962. He went on to receive a medical degree from Wayne State University School of Medicine in 1965 and initially worked as an Air Force psychiatrist in Vietnam. Subsequently, from 1969 to 1971, May became chief of inpatient services at Andrews Air Force Base, Washington, DC. Later on, he worked at

¹ Jacques Kelly, "Dr. Gerald Gordon May, 64, psychiatrist for prison system, author and teacher", *The Baltimore Sun*, April 12 (2005), accessed 10.05.2021, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-2005-04-12-0504120026-story.html>.

the Spring Grove Hospital Center and Patuxent Correctional Mental Health Center of the Maryland state prisons system. May was also active in academia: at the Pennsylvania State University as clinical associate professor of psychiatry in 1972–73 as well as at the Temple University in Philadelphia as clinical associate professor of family medicine from 1972–77.²

In 1973, May joined the Shalem Institute as an associate, although he remained a practicing psychiatrist until 1988, when he embarked on a complete career change. In the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, a Bethesda ecumenical Christian community dedicated to the support of contemplative living, May first became a staff member in 1983, and subsequently a senior fellow, teaching workshops on contemplative theology and psychology until his death in 2005. There, he taught more than 1,000 students of various faith traditions and his colleagues underlined his childlike playfulness combined with a deep faith. He had five children (four sons and one daughter) as well as nine grandchildren.³

May himself summarizes his life experiences in the following way:

I studied and practiced psychiatry for a quarter of a century; I know how the human mind can fool itself and how selfishness can masquerade as righteousness. I worked in a prison with people convicted of repeated crimes of physical violence, and I was in the military for the majority of the Vietnam war, so I have no doubt that evil exists and that we humans are capable of absolute destructiveness. And I have spent enough time in silence to know that my own impulses, perceptions, and additions often lead me astray. I believe in sin, not only as making mistakes or being compelled by addiction, but also as hard, calculated meanness.⁴

2. AN OVERVIEW OF MAY'S MAJOR PUBLICATIONS

Gerald Gordon May has authored a number of significant books and dozens of articles. Let us have a closer look at his books in a chronological way.

In *Simply Sane: Stop Fixing Yourself and Start Really Living*, he suggests that positive and productive self-awareness will help us understand that

² May, *Gerald G. 1940-2005*, accessed 10.05.2021, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/may-gerald-g-1940-2005>.

³ Kelly, "Dr. Gerald Gordon May".

⁴ Gerald G. May, *The Awakened Heart: Living beyond Addiction* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 62–63.

change, while inevitable, need not be negative. Subsequently, *The Open Way: A Meditation Handbook*, provides basic instructions of how to develop a sound meditation practice, including a variety of relaxation and breathing techniques. This book was considered to be useful for beginners as well as for advanced meditators.⁵

His next two books were written at the same time: *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit: Psychiatric Dimensions of Spiritual Direction* and *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology*. It was an interesting personal experience for him as he states:

I had never experienced writer's block before, but in 1979, three years into writing of *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology*, the work suddenly stopped. I had a passionate desire to continue writing, but nothing would come. I was working with cutting edge material, exploring questions about the contemplative life for which I had no clear answers.... Finally I thought, if I can't continue this book right now, I'll just write another one, I'll write about something I know. I set aside the troublesome manuscript, put a fresh stack of paper beside my typewriter, and began *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit*. The book just spilled onto the paper.⁶

May is openly honest about his experience as a compassionate fellow human being. It was the virtue that characterized his life and work, and is also to be found in his writings. In *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit: Psychiatric Dimensions of Spiritual Direction*, May clearly distinguishes between psychological and spiritual methods of psychotherapy and does it with an astounding simplicity and depth as he underlines the foundation of the being human, spiritual longing. In *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology*, May continues these ideas, going even deeper into mystery and mysticism. This is probably the most advanced and extensively developed of May's reflection pertaining to matters of psychology and spirituality. Some reviewers called this work "a ground-breaking book."⁷ We will talk about it more later on.

Probably the most known and most influential of May's works is *Addiction and Grace*. In this book, in an exquisite way, May confronts both, the psychological and the spiritual dimensions of substance abuse. For many people, his approach has proven to be very helpful as he uncovers the deepest

⁵ May, Gerald G. 1940–2005.

⁶ Gerald G. May, *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit. Psychiatric Dimensions of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1992), XIII.

⁷ May, Gerald G. 1940–2005.

and most intimate desires of the human heart.⁸ James Alsdurf wrote in *Christianity Today* that in this book, May leads us “to a new experience of the ‘most powerful force in the universe.’”⁹ In another book, *The Awakened Heart: Living beyond Addiction*, May also talks about dependency. There he states that addiction can be overcome by developing one’s trust and love as well as by acknowledging their presence and acquiring an understanding of the interior void in ourselves that only God can fill. Henri Nouwen said that this book teaches how to well choose the object of our love.¹⁰

One of the last of May’s books turned in a more explicit way towards the Christian heritage of mystical experiences. *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection between Darkness and Spiritual Growth*, published in 2004, explores the experience of darkness in view of both modern psychiatric research and the history of the Spanish mystics John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, demonstrating the transformative potential of such experiences. Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat in *Spirituality and Practice*, commented that May has skillfully linked psychology and spirituality, as well as clarified otherwise quite complex spiritual phenomena.¹¹

The last of May’s books is very different. In it, May, knowing his health condition, foresees his imminent death. The topic is much different from those in previous books and he says it well: *The Wisdom of Wilderness: Experiencing the Healing Power of Nature*. In this book, May shares his personal experience and we come to know him very intimately: in both his strengths and his weaknesses. *Library Journal* reviewer Graham Christian said that this book is fluidly written and deeply moving.¹² Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat in *Spirituality and Practice* made this comment about the book: “Mother Nature calms his soul and teaches him to let down his defenses and be open and receptive to her teachings. May writes about night fear, cicada song, a perfection of trees, a swan killing a duck, the seasons, rainstorms, and more”¹³.

⁸ Andrzej K. Jastrzębski, „Uzależnienie a łaska”, in: *Spiritualitas*, ed. Jan K. Miczyński, vol. 2: *Wyzwolenie i modlitwa* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2016), 113–124.

⁹ James Alsdurf, “Review of *Addiction and Grace*,” *Christianity Today* 33 (May 12, 1989).

¹⁰ May, *The Awakened Heart*, cover.

¹¹ Frederic & Mary Ann Brussat, “The Dark Night of the Soul. A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth”, *Spirituality & Practice*, accessed 11.05.2021, <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/view/8234/the-dark-night-of-the-soul>.

¹² Gina Christian, “Review of *The Wisdom of Wilderness*”, *Library Journal* 131 (July 1, 2006): 81.

¹³ Frederic & Mary Ann Brussat, “The Wisdom of Wilderness: Experiencing The Healing Power of Nature”, *Spirituality & Practice*, accessed 11.05.2021, <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/view/16928/the-wisdom-of-wilderness>.

Many of Gerald May's writings haven't lost their pertinence for our times and selected views from them would add clarity and depth to our knowledge of the human psyche by being reconsidered anew. We will begin with a general critic of the instrumentalization of spirituality in our modern society that remains valid until now, to subsequently introduce the reader into the most transforming and most demanding way of living one's spirituality: spiritual surrender. The bridge to the last topic will be May's excellent and profoundly developed understanding of spiritual longing.

3. CONTEMPORARY DEFORMATIONS OF SPIRITUALITY

In presenting his diagnosis of spirituality's role in contemporary society, May joins many other voices of our time that criticize the use and overuse of spirituality for egoistic reasons. This phenomenon has been labeled by Charles Taylor as a "subjective turn."¹⁴ For many of our contemporaries, this new understanding of spirituality seems to be more self-serving, oftentimes becoming individualistic as it has been fueled by a cultural shift that has led to the narcissistic idea of private spirituality. David Tacey describes this private spirituality as an illusion, or as "a transitional stage between a former state of sleep and a future mission of social responsibility and commitment."¹⁵

But May goes further than such statements and develops a more in-depth analysis and typology of how spirituality can be and in fact has been instrumentalized in three essential ways: to help people cope with life's atrocities, to help them be happier and to help them in achieving their full human potential.¹⁶ In a significant number of studies, spirituality has been shown to be very effective in helping people to cope with all kinds of difficulties.¹⁷ As such, it seems to produce a very positive outcome, but unfortunately, the persons who use their spirituality as a coping tool don't seem to reap the happiness they are searching for.¹⁸

¹⁴ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 26.

¹⁵ David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (London: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 148.

¹⁶ Gerald G. May, *Will and Spirit. A Contemplative Psychology* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), 11–12.

¹⁷ Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997).

¹⁸ May, *Will and Spirit*, 14.

The happiness mentality is a conviction that if one lives one's life correctly, one will be happy. Consequently, people presume that when they are not happy, they are doing something wrong and go for counseling in order to remedy their situation. If their solution does not produce visible fruit in a reasonably short time, they become even unhappier than before. People adhering to a happiness mentality do not accept the dark side of themselves nor do they believe in a spiritual process. Without discovering and accepting these realities, they are not able to be fully happy.¹⁹

Both coping and happiness mentalities twist people's spiritual life toward narcissism and promote spiritual willfulness as both of these coping mechanisms use spirituality as a tool for their personal ends. They are not truly interested in developing the spiritual dimension of their lives with an openness to spiritual letting go and surrender. This pertains especially to prayer. When people feel less suffering or pain, they say that the prayer was good – otherwise it was not. In reality, prayer does not always create a state of euphoria or even simply pleasant feelings. Everyone who has taken up some spiritual discipline in their lives is quite aware of that fact and tries to avoid downplaying the effectiveness of their prayers.²⁰

The third modern mindset towards spirituality is the growth mentality. On this approach, one accepts the existence of suffering, but attempts to creatively find a way of making it work for oneself. On the growth approach, one uses a syncretic combination of spiritual paths such as yoga, acupuncture, biofeedback, and the Christian charismatic movement to name but a few. It also uses certain chosen elements of spirituality in order to achieve personal goals.²¹

4. SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AS A UNITIVE EXPERIENCE

Spiritual experiences are distinguished by a qualitative difference in intensity of emotions, as well as by the connectedness to an infinite reality. One of the first scholars to characterize these was William James.²² He presented them as follows:

¹⁹ Ibid., 14–15.

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

²¹ Ibid., 19.

²² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Seven Treasures Publications, 1990).

1) *Ineffability*, or the inability to find accurate words to describe or convey an experience. This usually implies that a high level of openness is required to understand these accounts.

2) A *noetic quality*, or insights that do not appear conceivable in the regular state of consciousness.

3) *Transiency*. These experiences are temporary, lasting from a few seconds to a few minutes or hours. Nevertheless, they leave lasting effects, and often become a point of departure for a further spiritual journey.

4) *Passivity*. One is invited to surrender to the experience, as if held by a divine presence.²³

Another renowned scholar, Evelyn Underhill, added her own four rules to these four James' characteristics:

1) Mystical experiences are active and personal, lived in inner encounters, not passive and theoretical or abstract.

2) Their aim is purely spiritual and transcendent: reaching union with God.

3) They are pursued as a personal love for the eternal One, which transcends dialectic and reason.

4) They change the entire orientation of one's life as they lead to major life decisions fueled by the desire of sanctity. Beyond these rules, she says that mysticism is not a self-seeking endeavor. Nor is it a search for spiritual joys and knowledge. It is all about love for love's sake.²⁴

May points to a variety of spiritual experiences such as dramatic changes in one's faith, the discovery of divine love, charismatic healings, private revelations, and possession experiences. Special kinds of spiritual experience are intuitive ones such as obtaining an inner understanding of what is necessary in a given situation. However, the most fundamental kind of spiritual experience is the unitive experience which is the most paradigmatic and the most mysterious. It is characterized by true intuition and radical spontaneity. Unitive experiences can occur in the middle of everyday life, when one is caught up in awe and when everything seems to stand still with one's awareness clear and wide-open.²⁵

Unitive experiences often happen in nature or in other aesthetic settings like while listening to beautiful music or contemplating a breathtaking piece of art. They may also occur in the experience of intimacy between two per-

²³ Ibid., 342–344.

²⁴ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (Santa Cruz: Evinity, 2009), 51–52.

²⁵ Ibid., 52–53.

sons, in the context of a close encounter with death, during a major life crisis or at a time of intense suffering. What is to be noted is that these moments alter one's state of consciousness. Although there are many attempts to trigger such experiences at will, using for instance breathing meditation, psychedelic drugs, and biofeedback, such activities do not bring the same effect. Any attempt at producing unitive experiences of this kind proves to be self-defeating. The only thing we can do is to prepare ourselves, by practicing certain spiritual disciplines, in order to become more receptive to these experiences when they come.²⁶

5. FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF UNITIVE EXPERIENCES

The unitive experience is characterized by the being-at-one state without any self-defining activities that accompany it, for example, feeling something or reflecting on what is actually happening. There is no feeling of being-at-one, neither is there an accompanying reflection on it. May says that once such elements appear, the unitive experience is over.²⁷ He further states: "The cessation of self-defining activities includes many things that we generally take for granted. In full realization of union there is, for example, no idea of controlling, accomplishing, or even of *doing* anything. Time seems to stop – and actually does, for time is a way of defining and locating oneself in terms of past, present, and future. Thus, in looking back upon unitive experiences, people are given to say that they were suspended in the 'eternal present', immersed in immediacy."²⁸

Unitive experiences do not remove one's body sensations and do not prevent one from navigating a given physical space. During such moments, one can even perform certain actions and speak, but there is no consideration of self.²⁹ The second characteristic of unitive experiences is the major change in awareness it produces. In such moments, it becomes alert, sharp, awake, radically open, and all senses are acute, although not directed to any object.³⁰ The third characteristic of these experiences pertains to the feelings that may appear directly after such moments. They can be a sense of awe, of beauty or wonder, and provide an intuition of truthfulness as well as a sense of fulfill-

²⁶ Ibid., 58.

²⁷ Ibid., 59.

²⁸ Ibid., 60.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 61.

ment and love. The immediate feeling after unitive experiences may also include some anxiety or even frustration. The latter feeling appears especially when people try to make this experience last longer than it naturally occurs.³¹

Normally, unitive experiences are very powerful moments. Nevertheless, May notes that it is striking that they tend to be easily forgotten and do not produce any particular transformation in one's life. The most common fruit of a unitive experience is a humble awareness of being both human and fragile. This experience does not create a sense of grandiosity nor a desire to convert all humanity, but rather instills it with a yearning to become more of a servant of humanity, more other-concerned and compassionate as opposed to the misuse of spirituality that increases self-concern and self-importance which result in distancing oneself from others rather than getting closer to them.³² This way of seeing the difference between either a genuine or superficial way of living one's spirituality was already noted by James and has been brought up also recently by Young and Cashwell as they assert that a genuine spirituality leads "to experience self-transcendence and awareness of sacred immanence, with resulting increases in greater self-other compassion and love."³³ May adds with profound insight that such spiritual experiences can become threatening to the individual's self-image and in such a case people overreact to them in a compensatory and narcissistic way which prohibits such fruits as compassion to come to light.³⁴ In this context May comments: "From the outside, a person with a truly contemplative heart may appear no different from anyone else. But inside, the difference is radical. Nothing happens apart from God's presence. And when the situation calls for it, the person's responses may be seen for what they are: willing to sacrifice life itself in the cause of love."³⁵

May's important contribution in analyzing the impact of unitive experiences on human life lies in underlining that this impact can be constructive, destructive or neutral depending on certain factors such as the presence or absence of the quality of loving, the strength of one's self-image or self-iden-

³¹ Ibid., 62.

³² Ibid., 63.

³³ J. Scott Young, and Craig S. Cashwell, "Integrating spirituality and religion into counseling: An introduction", in: *Integrating Spirituality and Religion into Counseling: A Guide to Competent Practice*, eds. J. Scott Young, Craig S. Cashwell (Alexandria: American Counseling Association, 2011), 7.

³⁴ May, *Will and Spirit*, 63.

³⁵ May, *The Awakened Heart*, 208–209.

tity as well as the life situation in which this experience happens³⁶. Moreover, many unitive experiences are so brief that they often go unnoticed leaving only some kind of unidentified longing. It seems that only longer experiences of this kind are able to leave some noticeable traces but even then, they can simply be repressed by a threatened, weak ego.³⁷

6. SPIRITUAL LONGING

Spiritual longing is one of the key elements of May's spiritual anthropology. In fact, it is the very foundation of it. The concept of spiritual longing linked to the spiritual void³⁸ is the axis of May's conceptualization of any human addiction.³⁹ In a beautiful way, May translates the famous Augustinian saying into more contemporary terms that "Our heart remains restless until it rests in God".⁴⁰ "In moments when the clouds of confusion clear and we can see our longing in perspective, it appears as a nagging knowledge that we come from somewhere and that we exist for some purpose. Our search, then, is a seeking for our deepest roots-not the roots of family, nor of race, nor even of the human species, but our roots as creatures of and in this cosmos."⁴¹

This spiritual longing can be seen as a humble realization that we have forgotten who we are, from which our quest for meaning, and for ultimate truth, originates.⁴² At times, while searching for this "something more" in our lives, we come to a realization that, more importantly, beyond our own search, we have been *searched for* and that we no longer need to search, because *we have already been found*. Nevertheless, the longing persists and sadly, we very often continue to search, up various blind alleys.⁴³

In this context, May warns us not to put too much emphasis on psychology or neurobiology, since doing so will not give us a true understanding of our spiritual longing.⁴⁴ In fact, psychology often tries to reduce our longing to some theory of personal need-meeting usually mixed with some narcissistic tenden-

³⁶ Gerald G. May, *Addiction and Grace. Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 98–101.

³⁷ May, *Will and Spirit*, 64.

³⁸ May, *The Awakened Heart*, 104.

³⁹ Jastrzębski, "Uzależnienie a łaska," 118.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 1.

⁴¹ May, *Will and Spirit*, 89.

⁴² May, *The Awakened Heart*, 58.

⁴³ May, *Will and Spirit*, 89.

⁴⁴ May, *The Awakened Heart*, 52.

cies. Only religion has the potential to speak to the immensity of our spiritual longing and each religion does it in its own – sometimes forgotten – ways.⁴⁵

Personality theories, when applied to the spiritual life, tend to cause more problems than they really help, in understanding spiritual processes. Statistical attempts to correlate personality types with spiritual experiences have failed. Unfortunately, some spiritual guides try to suggest to people how they should pray or look for God on the basis of their personality type. God is simply too surprising and creative for such classifications. In fact, people can become spiritually defeated trying to force themselves into a specific way of prayer or worship.⁴⁶

7. SPIRITUAL SURRENDER

The only way to somehow end our search, to quench our spiritual longing is to finally surrender, to acknowledge our being found. The paradox of spiritual surrender is that in giving oneself fully, one finds not passivity but intimate involvement, not restrictiveness but endless freedom, not blameless quietude but the deepest possible sense of responsibility. This understanding is reflected in the contemplative observation that as people progress in the spiritual life they become increasingly aware of their weaknesses, fallibilities, and sinfulness. Their ability to “determine” God’s will, which initially may have seemed rather blithe and straightforward, becomes more mysterious and more painfully delicate. To maintain an awareness of responsibility in the atmosphere of “not-knowing” is no easy thing. Yet this is what is called for in true surrender.⁴⁷

According to May, the following criteria describe true spiritual surrender:

1) It is *conscious*, wide awake and aware. There is no dullness or mindlessness.

2) It is *intentional* as it is the result of a free choice. It is never forced.

3) It is a *responsible* act of which multiple consequences are accepted in advance, even the possibility of a misplaced surrender and its possible destructiveness, without blaming anyone else.

4) It is *not directed toward anything or anyone* and thus it does not reinforce one’s self-importance or self-definition. It is directed toward the divine mystery, beyond any image or conceptualization.

⁴⁵ May, *Will and Spirit*, 90.

⁴⁶ May, *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit*, 213.

⁴⁷ May, *Will and Spirit*, 302–303.

5) It is a *willingness to engage the fullness of life with the fullness of oneself* without any escape or avoidance. It is a profoundly positive change of direction, leading one to a more mature spirituality.⁴⁸

Ultimately, authentic spiritual surrender is a responsible use of our human freedom and a humble acceptance of our deepest human dignity.⁴⁹ The fruit of this surrender – saying yes to love – is real, even in the absence of a clear vision of what is happening. It is the most liberating and authentic achievement we can accomplish in order to actualize what our free will was created for.⁵⁰

Although May attempts to remain on a more universal level of reflection, meaning more spiritual than theological, he clearly indicates that he speaks as a believer, a man of faith. He underlines that one has to surrender, one has to acknowledge the existence of the One Supreme Power, Creator and Redeemer who sustains our daily life. He is always cautious not to substitute the mystery of God with the way we tend to imagine God. Although we can encounter God within and through our images, God remains immeasurably beyond all image. God is truly knowable to us, but only in part. Thus, May reintroduces the concept of apophatism into the contemporary psychospiritual discourse.⁵¹ Our knowledge of God is always partial. We can experience God partially in ten thousand ways: in nature, in our creativity and even in the struggles of our hearts and minds, but this never happens in the full light.⁵²

In every tradition, there is a way of viewing spirituality that emphasizes the importance of images, symbols, and sensations. This kind of spirituality, classically known as kataphatic, has always been the most popular. In it, one seeks to attain a deeper awareness of God through visions, feelings, imagery, words, and other sensate or symbolic forms of experience. The second way emphasizes the truth of God that lies behind, and beyond, surpassing all sensory or intellectual representations. This is known as the apophatic way. Evangelical and charismatic Christianity markedly represent kataphatic spiritualities, whereas the Christian mysticism of John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart are distinctly apophatic spiritualities.⁵³

May portrays the process of true surrender as hope for the ultimate homecoming, which he describes as detachment, purification, affective redemp-

⁴⁸ Ibid., 308.

⁴⁹ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 139.

⁵⁰ May, *The Awakened Heart*, 49.

⁵¹ Andrzej Jastrzębski, *Homo Theomorphicus et Theophoricus. Receptive-Responsive Theory of Spirituality* (Leuven–Paris–Bristol: Peeters, 2019), 29–31.

⁵² May, *Will and Spirit*, 309.

⁵³ May, *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit*, 12.

tion, ongoing conversion or sanctification.⁵⁴ This homecoming is an ongoing process:

There is deep peace in this homecoming, but it is not at all the peace of death. It is a lively, rich, and immensely giving peace, a peace that sensitizes rather than insulates. It is a peace within which our hearts can find the courage and the fundamental human competence to taste the full flavor of every particle of life and to respond with absolutely fierce risking-trust to what is needed in every moment. When, if even for an instant, we die to our self-images and awaken to even a partial vision of Universal Truth, it becomes clear that we are already Home.⁵⁵

May admits that we can only make our home in God⁵⁶. And although our natural energies can be used in many ways to cover our innate spiritual longing, our attempts will not work unless we acknowledge our incompleteness, our always being in a process of becoming who we were called to be, until the time of final *theosis* or awakening through grace,⁵⁷ our ultimate and long-awaited union with God.

CONCLUSION

Gerald Gordon May is a prolific author that surprises us with the uniqueness and depth of his reflections. Although his approach is ecumenical and open to interreligious dialog, he remains faithful to his Christian heart. In a sense, his work remains an undiscovered treasure. There are many more interesting psychospiritual topics that he developed and that are worth appropriating, but it certainly goes beyond a simple publication of this kind. Here we can only name his presentation of psychospiritual understanding of mental disorders, sexuality, spiritual direction, contemplative attitude, and many others. We hope that this text can encourage the contemporary reader to reach out to and discover May's rich psychospiritual heritage.

Probably the most important message that one can read from May's works is his invitation to trust the most profound desires hidden deep in our hearts. While approaching the core of our being, we can discover an invitation to love which is universal in nature and reveals to us that through God's act of

⁵⁴ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 94–98.

⁵⁵ May, *Will and Spirit*, 310.

⁵⁶ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 95.

⁵⁷ May, *The Awakened Heart*, 54.

creation we are all interconnected or, better still, interdependent of each other. This should empower every one of us to exercise compassion and justice in our everyday life as well as tasting in every possible moment of life the sacredness of all there is around us. Thanks to the contemplative attitude that we are gifted with, our spiritual gaze will gradually find itself liberated from the egotistical chains that bind us.

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PSYCHOLOGIA KONTEMPLACYJNA GERALDA GORDONA MAYA (1940–2005)

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia główne koncepcje na styku psychologii i teologii duchowości w pracach Geralda Gordona Maya (1940–2005), przyrodniego brata bardziej znanego psychologa egzystencjalnego Rollo Maya. Ponieważ idee Geralda Maya nie przeniknęły do głównego nurtu psychologii religii oraz teologii duchowości, w niniejszym tekście autor wskazuje kilka możliwych przyczyn takiego stanu rzeczy. Prezentuje jednocześnie istotne elementy spuścizny Maya, ukazując go jako oryginalnego badacza pracującego na granicy psychologii i teologii duchowości o bardzo wnikliwym spojrzeniu na człowieka, którego idee były prawdopodobnie zbyt zaawansowane na swój czas. Aby argumentować na rzecz tej tezy, rozpoczynając od diagnozy instrumentalizacji duchowości we współczesnym społeczeństwie, zostały przedstawione zręby psychologii i teologii kontemplacyjnej Maya, czyli unikalne ujęcie doświadczenia mistycznego, opis duchowych pragnień człowieka oraz ich potencjalny owoc, którym jest całkowite poddanie się Bogu.

Słowa kluczowe: teologia duchowości; psychologia; doświadczenie mistyczne; duchowa tęsknota; poddanie się Bogu.