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Thoughts on Prayer and the Divine Immanence.

By Evelyn Underhill, Fellow of King's College, London.

I.

Senator Marconi has lately said in an interview, that the discovery and development of wireless may yet give us a scientific basis for prayer—the most mysterious perhaps of all man's powers and activities. Sir James Jeans suggests a more profound analogy, when he tells us in *The Mysterious Universe* that the radiation of every electron composing the physical cosmos is bounded only by the limits of that cosmos. Thus the outpouring and self-giving energies of one such electron can fill all space; and during our whole lives we are receiving and are conditioned by the radiations and influence of countless worlds and their unimaginable constituents, falling on us, changing us, maintaining us. That is an impressive allegory of the universe of spirit, and the unseen forces by which it is maintained, and gains in significance when we consider how spendthrift, powerful, and costly is the spiritual radiation of the saints. But it is an allegory which seems to imply a view of prayer that regards it as a purely human and largely a utilitarian activity; a force which man directs to God; or which, by a sort of holy telepathy, he can exert by his own choice and cost as towards his fellow-men. Yet we cannot on this basis construct such a wide and rich doctrine of Christian prayer as shall find a place for its most far-reaching characters and developments. Any study of it which conceives it mainly, so to speak, as the action of discrete spiritual individuals, surely misses its central truth; namely, the solidarity of that total and supernatural action which is brought into existence by the Divine energy and exerted by God through and in the corporate activity of all praying souls.

For what, after all, is prayer? It is a mutual act, a communion of the created spirit with Uncreated Spirit: of the human self, immersed in contingency and succession, with the all-penetrating God who yet transcends contingency and succession—in whom, as St. Augustine said, 'are all moments of time.' It is therefore the religious act *par excellence*; and rightly understood, should give us a clue to all that religion means in the life of man. 'We know in general,' says Grou, 'that prayer is a religious act; but when it comes to praying, we easily lose sight of the fact that it is a supernatural act, which is consequently beyond our power, and which we cannot properly perform without the inspiration and help of grace.' The initiative then, in all genuine prayer, is not human but Divine. It is a work of prevenience. And next, I think, we must add that this communion of spirit with Spirit to which we are mysteriously urged, and which more and more dominates those lives that are becoming sensitive to God, is purposive. It always looks beyond itself to some further creative goal—great or small, general or particular, remote or immediate—to be achieved by this collaboration of Divine and human will and desire. If we give a sufficiently wide and deep content to our terms, this will be found on analysis to be true even of the most apparently passive and formless prayer of contemplation, which seems to the praying soul to be no more than the expression of its own thirst for surrender, and merely to place it at the disposal of God. For since the ultimate goal of the immanent Divine Will must be the supernaturalization of all life, and prayer is a sovereign means through which the Divine Immanence works, we cannot deny the purposive nature of such passive and generalized prayer. It is indeed always declared by the mystics to have profound effects, which are not limited by its transforming action on personality. They regard it as the medium of an actual conveyance of life, and hence the direct cause of their powers. 'This prayer, stripped of image and apperception, idle in appearance and yet so active, is,' says Grou again, 'the adoration truly worthy of God, wherein the soul *unites herself to Him in her ground*; the created intelligence to Uncreated Intelligence, without the intervention of imagination or reasoning or anything else but a very simple attention of the mind and an equally simple application of the will.'

Prayer, then, in the most general sense, is from the Divine side purposive. Its creative goal, however, may be concerned with almost any level or aspect of physical or spiritual life; for the prayer of a wide-open and surrendered human spirit appears to be a major channel for the free action of that Spirit of God with whom this soul is 'united in her ground.' Thus it seems certain that the energy of prayer can avail for the actual modifying of circumstance; and that its currents form an important constituent of that invisible web which

moulds and conditions human life. It may open a channel along which power, healing, or enlightenment go to those who need them, as the watering-can provides the channel along which water goes to the thirsty plant. Or the object achieved may be, as we say, 'directly spiritual'; the gradual purifying and strengthening, and final sublimation of the praying soul or of some other particular soul. In all such cases, though much remains mysterious, the connexion between prayer and result appears as the connexion of genuine cause and effect. We are plainly in the presence of that which Elisabeth Leseur called 'a high and fruitful form of action, the more secure that it is secret.' On the other hand, the prayer may seem to have no specified aim; and this is specially true of its more developed forms. As spiritual writers say, its energies may simply be 'given to God.' Thus it may do a work which remains for ever unknown to the praying soul; contributing to the good of the whole universe of spirits, the conquest of evil, the promotion of the Kingdom, the increased energy of holiness. Such general and sacrificial prayer has always formed part of the interior life of the saints, and is an enduring strand in the corporate work of the Church. When St. Teresa founded the discalced Carmelites, it was not to promote the culture of individual souls, but in order that the corporate hidden prayer of these communities might generate power, combating in some degree the wickedness she saw in the world. It was of this aspect of prayer that Cardinal Mercier spoke, when he said in one of his pastorals, 'Through an ever closer adherence to the Holy Spirit in the sanctuary of your soul, you can, from within your home circle, the heart of your country, the boundary of your parish, overpass all earthly frontiers and . . . intensify and extend the Kingdom of Love.'

For genuine prayer in all its degrees, from the most naïve to the most transcendental, opens up human personality to the all-penetrating Divine activity. Progress in prayer, whatever its apparent form, consists in the development of this its essential character. It places our souls at the disposal of immanent Spirit. In other words, it promotes abandonment to God; and this in order that the soul's separate activity may more and more be invaded, transfigured, and at last superseded by the unmeasured Divine action. In Pauline language, maturity of soul is to be gauged by the extent in which the Spirit 'prays in us.' Such deductions from observed experience can only be made humbly and tentatively; for one factor, God, is largely unknown to us, and the other, the soul, only in a subjective way. But we may say without impropriety that prayer—first incited by God's prevenient action, and then used by Him for His creative purpose—is to be regarded from man's side as a movement out towards absolute action, and from God's side as one of the ways in which the Divine Immanence works.

II.

It follows from all this that there can be no valid and realistic doctrine of prayer which does not rest on and involve a doctrine of God: and conversely that no doctrine of God is adequate which does not take account, and even very great account, of the findings of the life of prayer. We cannot separate spiritual practice and spiritual belief without reducing the first to a dependence on our fluctuating feeling-states, and the second to a series of 'agreed propositions.' In prayer the soul comes nearest the expression of absolute love: in belief it ascends by means of symbols towards absolute truth. *Lex orandi lex credendi* is true then, perhaps in a far more actual sense than those who first made that axiom supposed. On the one hand the life of prayer is at least as much an established fact in the human world as the life of creative art or philosophic thought. It arises and develops wherever there is a living sense of God. Therefore its witness to reality should be accorded the respectful attention due to any 'real existent.' The attempts of naturalistic psychology to explain it on subjective lines break down before any honest and persistent study of its real character and achievements. So, too, all efforts to account for its existence by reference to the outlook and habits of primitive man, evade the real issue, and merely describe the puppy without reference to the functions of the dog. For prayer is rooted in ontology. It is an appeal from the successive to the Abiding, without which succession has no meaning at all. It is a genuine communion with Reality, or nothing. This communion may be in its beginnings crude and childish; directed towards such signs and images as mediate the Transcendent to the awakening soul. But even so, it points beyond the natural scene to the concrete reality and independence of God, His attraction, His free and intimate working in human life: and marks the first stirrings of the creaturely sense. Thus the very existence of the life of prayer—adoration, communion, impetration, however naïve their primitive embodiments—requires for its explanation the immanent presence and self-

disclosure of this real and actual God, and cannot be accounted for in terms of human or natural process.

Moreover prayer, and especially the result of prayer, bears its own witness to the character of this Immanent God; and corrects the modern emphasis on visible Nature as the capital scene of His self-disclosure to man. For it leads the self into a level of life wholly other than that of Nature; and shows it the rich and mysterious web of existence in spiritual regard. And though this vision is far too great for us, and produces by its very radiance the obscurities of faith, still these humbling disclosures which awe and delight us, these glimpses of the dark mystery of God, do effect first a purification and then an undreamed expansion and enlightenment of the psyche; making it more supple to the Divine action, more amenable to the creative pressure of the Divine life. By that inward growth which has been codified as the 'ascending degrees of prayer,' the human self does more and more transcend the physical. It enters more and more into a richer and deeper knowledge of God, a sense of the profoundly purposive character that inheres in all the movements of the Spirit; whether realized through circumstances, or obscurely felt in the soul. So that it comes at last to the state which, says St. John of the Cross, consists simply in this, that 'the soul must now learn to receive, to let Another act in her.'

This means that the knowledge of Divine Immanence which grows with the deepening of man's prayer is also the knowledge of a Divine Otherness. Hence the constantly heard modern invitation to seek and find God in Nature—that is to say, in the physical scene, or rather our ever-changing and often bewildered apprehension of that physical scene—may result in actual damage to the deepest interests of religion, if it is allowed to obscure the primacy of those revelations of reality which are made only in the deeps of that communion wherein the spirit 'seeks God in her ground.' 'The closer a soul approaches God by love,' says Maritain, 'the simpler grows the gaze of her intelligence, and the clearer her vision.' And this loving approach to God Himself, for Himself and for none of His works, is of the very essence of prayer.

This intimate connexion between vision and love is borne out by experience: as indeed we must expect, if the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit—the indwelling of the creature by the Godhead under its attribute of purposive love—be true. The mind and soul of a mature man of prayer have simplified their gaze, and deepened and broadened their correspondences with Reality; and the result is seen in a peculiar confidence in the universe, a profound and peaceful acceptance of experience in its wholeness and not only in purely religious regard. Such a soul, though it may and commonly does remain inarticulate as regards its deepest findings, knows existence, is aware of the mysterious movements and pressure of the Spirit, in a way others do not. Because of its humble and disciplined communion with that immanent Spirit, it has achieved a flexibility which can move to and fro between the inward and the outward; finding in both in the most actual sense the presence of a living, acting God. It is this loving discernment of Reality through and in prayer, this experience, which is meant by the phrase 'mystical theology' as employed by the great Christian masters of the spiritual life. And dogmatic theology, too, is necessarily concerned with Truth as seen from this angle; from within the house of prayer, and in the state of prayer. For here, within the house, though the lighting is dim, and much that we vaguely perceive is beyond our comprehension, we do at least realize the use of those pipes and chimney-pots which looked so queer and disconcerting from outside. Our difficulty in giving living content to our religious formulas, the dreadful sense of unreality which clings to many of the definitions of faith, arise very largely from the fact that we are thus viewing from the outside that which can only disclose its meaning when seen from the inside. For only in prayer, and in that state of soul which its practice tends to produce in us, can we know in any genuine sense the penetrating energy, the glowing splendour, the intimate yet unearthly pressure of that Divine Immanence which is the conditioning fact of personal religion. And to know this is to part company for ever from the dilute and sentimental immanentisms of naturalistic piety.

Thus it becomes clear that the theology of prayer is closely bound up with the theology of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is important to remember that when spiritual writers refer in general terms to God's presence in and action upon their souls, they are and must be referring to that which the technical language of religion defines as the 'work of the Holy Spirit.' The abyss of the Godhead is unknown to us; and save under obviously inadequate symbols, cannot be thought of by us. Here the Thomist distinction between 'sign' and 'thing' is experienced by the soul in its extreme form. It is the Spirit indwelling and moving Creation that we really mean, when we speak of

God experienced in prayer. Though the awe and rapture of the mystic, dazzled by glimpses of the Infinite, may find expression in the most transcendental language—still he remains a creature, subject to creaturely limitations; and his experience of Reality is of a creaturely kind. Thus Grou is surely speaking of God Immanent when he says: 'The spiritual life is nothing but a commerce, an exchange, between God and the soul. God gives that He may receive, and receives that He may give. The soul does the same. He gives His prevenient grace to the soul in Time: He gives it unending glory in Eternity. And this grace and this glory are a more or less perfect communication of God Himself.' Here we see the mind at work bringing together the findings of direct experience and the findings of theological thought. Grou's language, harmonizing with that of many other mystical writers, indicates that 'Grace' and 'God' are not as a matter of fact to be distinguished in experience. Grace is the self-giving of the immanent Divine Life. It is a name for the generous, personal, manward-tending love and will of God. And prayer in its widest and deepest sense is the expression of the Godward-tending love and will of man. If we relieve both terms of their spatial suggestions—of all idea of transit, the coming from one place or plane and going to another place or plane—and think of this Holy Spirit, as St. Thomas says, as God wholly present 'everywhere and at all times,' we get a fresh vision of this double self-giving movement, this 'commerce' of Spirit Uncreate and spirit created—which *is*, says Grou, the spiritual life—and of the worth and reality of prayer as depending on the degree in which it conforms to the conditions of this exchange.

III.

'Man,' says St. Thomas again, 'in so far as he is moved to act by the Spirit of God, becomes in a certain sense an instrument of God.' And since in the life of prayer it is above all God who acts, and incites by His pressure man's activity, it follows that in all real prayer — whatever its apparent character—the soul acts as the tool of the immanent Will and Love. This need not, of course, involve any consciousness of the Divine action: in fact, the greater the soul's simplicity and self-abandonment, the more that Divine action can and will overrule its small conscious activities. Every phase and type of prayer—Adoration, Communion, Impetration, Intercession — must be brought under this law. All apparent independence and spontancity on the soul's part, all exercise of our limited freedom, all acts of will—genuinely ours, and most necessary to the soul's health, as seen from the side of the creature—yet depend for their very production on the prevenient and overruling action of God. It is a chief paradox of the spiritual life that its growth in power, its capacity for heroic and creative action, advance step by step with the realization of its own complete dependence on the supernatural:

> Sine tuo numine
> Nihil est in homine,
> Nihil est innoxium.

Yet this realization of dependence is saved from the limp passivity of the quietists by the fact that the Divine action is ever felt to deepen and energize the self's action; transform, absorb, and use it, rather than abolish it. The exaggerated language of some contemplatives about 'ceasing to act' seems due to their overwhelming sense of the Divine activity: but as a matter of fact we must regard their souls as energizing deeply in order to maintain this condition of fruitful abandonment to the energy of God. There is no such thing as the 'holy idleness' with which they are sometimes charged. The two terms cancel each other: for sanctity, produced within the created order, can only be maintained by a constant tension, a willed surrender, a deliberate adherence of the will to God; which—though successive and perceptible acts may not be discerned in it—is none the less an action of the soul. This is what appears to be meant by the great saying of St. John of the Cross: 'The whole wisdom of the saints consists in knowing how to direct the will vigorously towards God.'

As we are nearer facts when we think of Spirit in terms of will than in terms of thought, so, too, prayer is on the whole best understood in terms of will and intention. True, in its advanced degrees, this will is chiefly manifest in a total movement of surrender, a mere placing of the soul in God's hand; and the further, deep action which results from this self-oblation is always felt to be the action of God rather than the deliberate action of the soul. Hence the external form taken by any one life of prayer matters little; except in so far as it avails to bring the praying soul into ever more complete harmony with the immanent Divine Will. And since the vocation of each soul within that great symphony differs, we need not be surprised by the wide diversities or even the apparent contradictions in *attrait* and in practice which are found in the world of prayer.

Seen from the human side, the energy of prayer seems to be exercised mainly in two directions—towards God, and towards men. We offer ourselves to God both as worshippers and as workmen, that our spiritual energy may be used to promote His purposes. It is true that many phrases of the great masters of prayer, taken alone and out of their context, would seem entirely to exclude that spiritual action of one soul on other souls for and in God, which is the essence of intercession, and would make the life of prayer consist entirely in adoration and adherence. But this contradiction is only apparent: and is simply a vigorous statement of the obligation to put first things first. The adoring surrender of the soul to God, and even a certain union with the immanent Holy Spirit, forms the one essential foundation of all intercessory action. For this depends primarily, not on the intensity of our sympathetic interest, our psychic sensitiveness or telepathic power—though all these may contribute to its effectiveness—but on a profound and selfless devotion to the purposes of the Divine Immanence. Even in the crudest, most naïve act of prayer, the soul lays itself open in some degree to that Divine action; and this movement, initiated by God, is completed and used by Him. Thus the purposive action of God and the soul collaborate in every prayer. 'Feelings,' 'experiences,' and all the rest, fade into insignificance before this most solemn privilege of men.

Adoration, then, is required of us as the condition of our entry into the supernatural action; as the temper of soul which alone maintains us within it, and gives to the praying self that suppleness and self-oblivion which make it amenable to the gentle impulsions of the immanent Spirit. Thus communion and collaboration, adherence and intercession, can never be separated in experience. They are the two aspects of that total life of prayer of which the key-word is to be *fiat voluntas tua*. Even while it moves, within the action of God, to an ever more complete individuation—a discovery and fulfilment of its unique task within the mystical body of praying souls—this life moves also to that profound surrender which places it, in action and in contemplation, wholly at the disposal of the living charity of God.

The Purpose of Deuteronomy, Chapter vii.

By Professor Adam C. Welch, D.D., New College, Edinburgh.

This chapter is again a unity which deals with the relation of Israel to the surrounding nations. Its position is that the holy nation must be segregated from all others. This was the purpose which Yahweh had when He brought it out of Egypt. In that great act He separated the people to Himself. In pursuance of this aim the chapter demands that these nations shall be put under the ban, and specially insists that there must be no connubium between the peoples, lest the pure religion be corrupted. The subject is developed in an address which employs the second singular, but has received a few plural additions. Unfortunately, since I cannot accept Steuernagel's, Puukko's, or Hempel's verdict about these omissions, it is necessary to examine them with some care.

Vv.$^{4b.\ 5}$ are generally recognized to be secondary. Not only are they plural, but they include a threat, which is directed, not against any neglect of the law about intermarriage with foreigners, but against failure to destroy their altars and religious emblems. The sentences turn the attention away from the main theme of the passage, the attitude of Israel to the foreigners themselves. V.^{4a} then forms the conclusion of v.^{3}. No Israelite is to accept a foreign girl as wife to his son, because that would turn the son away from Yahweh, and he would serve or it would cause him to serve strange gods.[1] V.^{6} then clinches the matter by the statement that Israel as a people is consecrated to Yahweh.

The mention of the election of Israel led to another addition, vv.$^{7.\ 8a}$. This sentence is not only plural in form, but introduces a somewhat irrelevant reflection. Vv.$^{6.\ 8b.\ 9}$ state that Yahweh chose Israel to be a peculiar people, and in pursuance of His purpose with it delivered it from Egypt. Israel, therefore, should recognize alike the character of

[1] Either read with Sam. LXX עבר for עברו, or with Ehrlich point עִבְרוּ.