

a part of the revival, countless thousands were taught to read. Who can estimate the subsequent effect upon Welsh literature and life? To the revival can also be traced the beginning of the Sunday School movement in Wales. And thus was created the demand for Bibles which led to the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society at the beginning of the next century. Who can assess the spiritual blessings which resulted from the reading and study of the Scriptures? Supreme over all remains the tremendous fact that through the labours of these men—whether in preaching or teaching or both—multitudes were won for the Saviour. These revivalists were faithful, each in his own sphere and particular vocation, to our Lord's commands—"Go ye and teach" (St. Matthew xxviii. 19) and "Go ye and preach" (St. Mark xvi. 15). Some were teachers; some were evangelists. It pleased God to crown their labours with abundant success.

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Ways of Prayer— Catholic and Protestant—II

BY THE REV. DOUGLAS WEBSTER, M.A.

Another diversity between Catholic and Protestant modes of prayer centres round the idea of God's Will. The Catholic believes that God's will is fixed and unalterable. Even so moderate a writer as A. L. Lilley concurs that "The uniform Christian tradition . . . condemns as of the nature of blasphemy every attempt or desire to bend the divine will to our own".³³ Père Grou teaches that we should lay aside our opinions and desires, "whether we pray in times of public calamities in Church or State, or whether we pray for our own needs, temporal or spiritual". He says to his readers: "Who are you, I ask again, to presume to impose your views upon the Lord?" On the other hand he appears almost to contradict this when he writes elsewhere in dealing with common prayer, "what might be refused to an isolated prayer or to the personal merit of a single individual, is granted to the unanimous prayer and combined merit of several. Each prayer by itself will be weak, but their union creates a force that God will not resist."³⁴ This is almost the thin end of the Protestant wedge. For on the whole the Protestant believes that it is possible

and good to prevail with God and even to change His Will. This is based on Scripture and not Neo-Platonism, for in the Bible we read that "Moses besought his God . . . and Yahweh repented of the evil which He said He would do unto His people". Luther carries this to an indefensible extreme and Kirk is surely justified in criticizing Heiler for quoting (in the first German edition of his book) with apparent approval one of Luther's prayers which runs: "Grant me my prayer. Thou must grant it. . . . I am an unworthy sinner, but I must have what I want. . . . Do not provoke us to extremes; if Thou move us to anger so that we withhold our reverence and our tithes, what will become of Thee? . . . We must *compel* God to come; we must *force* Him to grant our wishes with stern and hostile siege."¹¹ It is when we turn to Forsyth that we find the most reasonable and suggestive approach to this question. He gives full weight to the implications of the dominical prayer, "Thy will be done," recognizing that without this committal to the wisdom of God, prayer would be a very dangerous weapon in proportion as it was effective. "The rain that saved my crop might ruin my neighbour's." At the same time he suggests that there can be a wrong element of submission, amounting almost to quietism, in saying too soon, "Thy will be done," accepting in this way a situation as God's will simply through our own feebleness or sloth. He continues: "It may be His will that we surmount His will. It may be His higher will that we resist His lower. Prayer is an act of will much more than of sentiment, and its triumph is more than acquiescence. Let us submit when we *must*, but let us keep the submission in reserve rather than in action, as a ground tone rather than the sole effort. Prayer with us has largely ceased to be *wrestling*. But is that not the dominant scriptural idea?" And lest he should be misunderstood he explains his meaning further by distinguishing two aspects of God's will. "Nothing can alter God's grace, His *will* in that sense, His large will and final purpose . . . our salvation, our redemption in Jesus Christ. But for that will He is an infinite opportunist. His ways are very flexible. His *intentions* are amenable to us if His *will* is changeless." There are some magnificent passages in this connexion on the subjects of poverty and disease and in what sense they may be said to be God's will: they are too long to quote here. But he concludes his argument by suggesting that to struggle with God is one way of doing His will. Even "to resist is one way of saying 'Thy will be done'. It was God's will that Christ should deprecate the death God required. It pleased God as much as His submission to death. But could it have been pleasing to Him that Christ should pray so, if no prayer could ever possibly change God's will? Could Christ have prayed so in that belief? Would faith ever inspire us to pray if the God of our faith would be unmoved by prayer?"¹²

This difference of attitude between Catholics and Protestants on prayer and the will of God has its effect on the notion of importunity. Despite the parable of the unjust judge, Grou opposes it. He writes: "When a child of the smallest intelligence asks something of his father, knowing that he is dearly loved by him, is he not content to express his wish and having done so to rely on his father's kindness?"

Does he think that he will obtain nothing unless he worries him and is constantly saying the same thing? It would be wrong of him to behave so and he would be rightly reproached for doing his father an injustice."³⁷ He then applies the analogy to God with obvious results. Luther on the other hand is at times naïvely importunate in his prayers and even provides God with reasons for doing as he asks, as when praying against the Turks he says, "They are thy enemies more than ours, and if they persecute and beat us, they persecute and beat Thyself".³⁸ One is reminded of Don Camillo and the Communists. But Forsyth stoutly defends importunity, saying: "Does not Christ set more value upon importunity than on submission? 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you'." He refers also to the incident of the Syrophenician woman "where her wit, faith, and importunity together did actually change our Lord's intention and break His custom".³⁹

One further illustration of the difference between Catholic and Protestant attitudes to prayer may be seen in respect of fervour and dryness. The Catholic expects times of aridity and suspects constant fervour. There is an interesting recollection in von Hügel's little book, *The Life of Prayer*, in which he describes a meeting with the Sadhu Sundar Singh, and expresses surprise and disappointment when "that deeply sincere Indian convert told me that never since his conversion thirteen years before had he ever suffered one moment of spiritual dryness. I believed with a very experienced psychologist and philosopher friend of mine, that this opinion indicates a strange lack of self-knowledge, perhaps also of what is precisely meant by such dryness, on the part of this devoted Christian."⁴⁰ Von Hügel himself believed that we should treat dryness and desolation as we treat the recurrence of night within every twenty-four hours. Catholics are not in the least alarmed by dryness; indeed they would be suspicious if it did not come. They therefore have a much more positive attitude than Protestants towards it. I quote Chapman: "Make up your mind once for all that dryness is best, and you will find that you are frightened at having anything else."⁴¹ Evelyn Underhill says: "All the great masters of prayer insist that humble surrender, not spiritual fervour, is the best index of the soul's goodwill."⁴² Both Abbot Chapman and Evelyn Underhill constantly insist that it is very good for one's humility to feel unspiritual. Chapman writes: "To feel entirely unspiritual, to cease to wish for prayer and so forth, is a very good state to be in, and quite necessary for your spiritual progress. The only thing that matters is the 'fine point' of the soul, and you have to learn to live by that, and not by any feelings, even of the most spiritual kind. Our Lord will strip you of all spirituality, until you not only are sure you have no 'spiritual life', but also know that you ought not even to wish for it! (He adds) In prayer you can give yourself to God with all your incapability of praying, and offer Him all your dislike of spiritual things, and all your feeling of longing for what is purely natural. Hug it, even. The more you are stripped of all satisfaction and self-satisfaction, the more pleasing you are to our Blessed Lord." Elsewhere in Chapman's letters a similar example can be found of this inverse way of dealing with fervour. He says:

"Always remember that fervour is the contrary of luke-warmness, and therefore it always means (for us poor sinners) a *profound dissatisfaction with our own state*. When you become a saint, you will believe yourself to be the *greatest* of sinners—that is real fervour, when combined with the determination still to go on fighting."⁴³ This is how one of the best catholic directors deals with the over-scrupulous, who are always worrying whether their prayer is right. Catholic teaching aims at getting people not to worry about feelings in prayer at all. But in all fairness we must notice that even Forsyth recognized the danger of fervour. "There are fervent prayers which, by making people feel good, may do no more than foster the delusion that natural vigour or robust religion, when flushed enough, can do the work of the Kingdom of God."⁴⁴

It is astonishing to contrast this with the frequent evangelical assumption that fervour is constantly possible, and that where absent it must be induced before prayer can become real. Undoubtedly this is the function of chorus-singing in certain assemblies. Luther's method of inducing fervour is amusing. He says: "I am sometimes so cold and cheerless that I cannot pray; then I close my ears and say, 'I know God is not far from me, therefore I must cry to Him and invoke Him'. I set before myself the ingratitude and ungodly nature of the Adversary, and thereupon I become warm and burn with anger and hate and then I say, 'O Lord, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,' and so on. Thus my prayer grows warm and fervent."⁴⁵ Dr. Graham Scroggie, in the book to which we have already referred, says that God's purpose is that our Quiet Time should be a time of supreme joy. He gives a long extract from George Müller of Bristol, who wrote: "It has pleased the Lord to teach me a truth, the benefit of which I have not lost for more than fourteen years. The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how I might serve the Lord, or how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished."⁴⁶ Not all evangelicals would go so far as this in the pursuit of spiritual happiness, but it may be generally admitted that evangelical spirituality suspects, however wrongly, that something is amiss if fervour vanishes. And yet it was William Cowper, the great poet of the evangelical revival, who could write in the Olney Hymns: "Where is the blessedness I knew When first I saw the Lord?" Is not this aridity? May this not be all that distant or different from what St. John of the Cross less simply called "the dark night of the senses"?

It is time now to sum up. In considering the catholic way of prayer we may perhaps, for all our admiration of all that is good in it and all that judges ourselves, confess a sense of uneasiness on the following points.

1. In catholic devotion the place given to serious Bible reading would seem to be wholly inadequate. There seems to be insufficient recognition that the Word of God is the basis of all spiritual life and growth. Except in the advanced stages of mysticism there is no room

or allowance made for any come-back from God. The movement is wholly one-way, Godward.

2. The goal of catholic spirituality, namely divine union, can all too easily blur any ultimate distinction between God and man. The aim in some cases is almost Buddhist, that the soul should be absorbed into the divine. We are reminded of Denney's saying: "I would rather be saved in Christ than lost in God". But in these higher reaches of the mystic way the lover and the Beloved are frequently placed on exactly the same level. Yet there is nothing very unitive about the prayers of the psalmists. They are very much I-Thou. It may be a good thing in prayer to forget the ego, but it is dangerously deceptive to think we can lose it or leave it behind. Chapman wisely reminds one of his correspondents: "We all have one unpleasant person to live with, whom we can't get away from—ourselves."⁴⁴ Communion is not the same as union; we can never slip out of an I-thou relationship with God, not even momentarily, and however advanced we get in the spiritual life we remain for ever creatures, on earth and in heaven. We must agree with Raymond George that our Lord's piety falls into this category; it is an I-thou relationship with a strong sense of God as a Person and a real conversation with Him, not merely a belief that He is. The term 'communion' preserves the sense of relationship and the personal; the term "union" can endanger it.⁴⁵

3. The catholic way, despite all disclaimers, does seem to presuppose celibacy or virginity for any notable advance in the spiritual life. For instance, one of the simplest and most beautiful forms of contemplative prayer is to repeat the phrase: "O God, I want Thee and I do not want anything else". But can a family man with a wife and children really pray like this with absolute sincerity? He may indeed want God. He may want God more than anything else in the depths of his own soul. But unless he is very abnormal he will also want his wife and his children and therefore cannot possibly add "I do not want anything else". Nor are we really helped by Chapman's modification of this when he writes: "It is not necessary to 'want God and want nothing else'. You have only to 'want to want God, and want to want nothing else'.⁴⁶" It only leaves us with the same difficulty at one remove. We may feel much more at home with Chapman and at one with him when he writes: "We ought not to concentrate ourselves on our own spiritual life, but think about God and other people. Just as a mother does not think about her love for her child, but about the child, so we must not think about our love for God, but about God. But we can't think too much (when we have time at least!) of His love for us."⁴⁷ The New Testament does not expect us to find it easier to love God whom we have not seen than our brother whom we have seen. We must not strive after spiritual rarity. And no man can have everything, as Bonhoeffer reminds us. In a very realistic letter he says: "We ought to find God and love him in the blessings he sends us. If he pleases to grant us some overwhelming earthly bliss, we ought not to try and be more religious than God himself. . . . It is arrogant to want to have everything at once—matrimonial bliss, and the cross, and the heavenly Jerusalem, where there is no longer marriage, nor giving in marriage." Is this not being

more honest and ultimately more practical than some of these catholic directors? Bonhoeffer is again courageously honest when in discussing bereavement or separation from those we love he admits: "Nothing can fill the gap when we are away from those we love, and it would be wrong to try and find anything. We must simply hold out and win through. . . . It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap: he does not fill it, but keeps it empty so that our communion with another may be kept alive, even at the cost of pain."¹ How many letters of cheap condolence would have been re-worded if this truth had been grasped by would-be comforters!

The prayer of mysticism, concentrating exclusively on God with no reference to oneself, leaves the evangelical with an uneasy feeling. It is a sort of eschatological surrealism, super-imposing on the real what is not yet and not meant to be yet. Is there not something artificial in any method of prayer, however spiritual or advanced, which does not take into account all the factors of involvement in life? It is one thing to make part of our prayer a concentration on God alone, as in some of the psalms and in our acts of adoration. It is very different to make this our sole prayer and our whole prayer. It is equivalent to living spiritually on a pillar. It may be wisdom to attempt to become what we are; it is certainly folly to try to become what we are not. Is not the danger of mysticism an over-eager anticipation, seeking to enjoy in the "now" of the present what is only intended for the "then" of the future? In history the Christian cannot pass beyond history and should not try to.

4. The Three Ways may serve as a useful rough guide to spiritual development, but they can surely be made too much of. Is it not true that many Christians are in all three concurrently? May they not be simultaneous spiritual experiences at different levels and not always successive? For instance, most evangelical Christians at a very early stage of their spiritual experience will have at least some notion, however faint, of the unitive way, and will not regard it as a very distant goal. Many of them are converted through such a text as Revelation iii. 20, with its emphasis on the in-coming Christ, and they are soon taught the meaning, however inadequately, of Galatians ii. 20, with its emphasis on the indwelling Christ. Similarly most evangelicals would feel that they never pass wholly out of the purgative way; sin remains a reality to the end and the battle for purity goes on without respite. It was the aged Paul who called himself the chief of sinners, and one has only to dip into Helen Waddell's lives of the Desert Fathers to realize the nature of their spiritual struggle. The "three ways" tends to make the Christian life a little too stereotyped. George Macleod, in his book *Only One Way Left*, makes short work of the three ways. He criticizes the Fathers for introducing the Via Negativa and the way of interior denial, for "Unfortunately the Via Negativa cuts dead across the Emmaus Road". He will have none of this. The meaning of the incarnation and the resurrection is that God is here and God is now. I quote his own forceful words. "We do not have to climb to God, or circle the world, with intellectual flight or devotional excursion. He comes down and He comes in. . . . We have been given union with God, whether we like it or not, want it or

not, know it or not." "The lesson of the Incarnation is that you cannot do a thing about getting nearer God. Here is the Evangel—when Israel were dead beat and weary, trying with the noblest methods yet devised to get nearer God, in the superb words of an ancient prayer of the Nativity, 'While all things were in quiet silence, and that night was in the midst of her swift course, Thine Almighty Word leaped down out of Thy Royal Throne: Hallelujah!'"⁵²

When we turn to the Protestant, or more particularly the Evangelical way of prayer, to discover what is lacking or weak in our own tradition, we may perhaps make these observations.

1. Not only do we have no systematic method of praying, which as we have seen is not necessarily a disadvantage, but we have no serious systematic teaching about prayer. In the revised edition of Griffith Thomas's book, *The Catholic Faith*, out of 300 pages there are less than eight on prayer. A strange sense of proportion seems to be in command when over against this we set seven further pages at the end of the book devoted to opposing prayers for the dead. I myself cannot recall ever having been properly instructed in how to pray, even during what was a very careful preparation for confirmation. Evangelicals do not come behind others in exhorting the faithful to pray and in stressing its importance, but they give very little help on how you do it and what you say; nor do they take much account of growth or stages in the life of prayer. For the most part they have no interest in the psychology of prayer comparable to their interest in the psychology of conversion. Charles Simeon preached a number of sermons on prayer, which can still be found in the index of his twenty-two volumes, but all these are either on the necessity or the efficacy of prayer—there is nothing about the "how" of praying. It seems to have been assumed that evangelicals would use their own words and marshal their own thoughts and in the last resort turn to the prayers of the liturgy. But the catholic, both in the pulpit and in the confessional, will attempt to guide each individual soul in the life of prayer in a way which would never occur to the average evangelical. The newly published *Guide for Spiritual Directors* illustrates this, for almost half the book is devoted to training the individual in private prayer. At the same time no accusation can be levelled against evangelicals for not praying or for under-rating the importance and the efficacy of prayer. We need only remember the example of the Clapham sect and others like them, including many of the greatest missionaries, who gave three hours a day to prayer.

2. Evangelicals certainly practise meditation, though less self-consciously than catholics. It is unsystematic, even spontaneous, and always a by-product of Bible study. In some respects it is more limited than the catholic method, for there is no series of compositions to go through or questions to ask, but in other ways it is far more comprehensive as it has access to the whole Bible. The evangelical believes that in any part of the Bible he can encounter God and hear His Word. And he knows he can hear God's word "new every morning", even if he is in a dry period. In the early years of the war the I.V.F. published a six-volume course of Bible Study, entitled *Search the Scriptures*, covering the whole Bible. Anyone who followed

through any part of that course was embarking on meditation quite as advanced and probably much more profitable than in the most elaborate catholic system. But having allowed this, we must still admit that we give very little instruction in our congregations about meditation.

3. When we come to consider affective prayer, at first sight it may seem to be totally absent from the evangelical tradition; there is certainly nothing that goes by this name. But does not the sometimes excessive singing of hymns and choruses among evangelical groups take the place of the more sober affective prayer in the catholic system? Many evangelicals would be hard put to it to explain why they enjoyed hymn-parties and chorus-singing; theologically and liturgically it is almost indefensible. And yet spiritually and psychologically it is necessary, for in this way the evangelical lets loose his affections and by making a joyful noise unto the Lord pours out his love and praise to the great Redeemer. It may be judged a good thing that evangelicals should be taught quieter and deeper methods of affective prayer, such as the private repeating of some of St. Bernard's hymns, and in the long run this may be more edifying. But it cannot be said that affective prayer is unknown among evangelicals; the hymns of the Wesleys have set it among us for ever.

4. It is when we come to contemplative prayer that we find evangelicalism most lacking, and this is Kirk's main criticism of protestant prayer life. Some will argue that this degree of prayer is not really necessary or even desirable. And yet all the evidence of the strains of modern life would seem to suggest the contrary. The peculiar difficulties of conducting a Quiet Day in an evangelical theological college serve to illustrate the evangelical aversion to silence and stillness. Paul Claudel, the catholic poet, wrote in a letter to André Gide: "All evils come from man's not being able to sit still in a room".⁶³ Most evangelicals, outside the Quaker tradition, know very little about the prayer of quiet, however much lip-service they may pay to the idea of it. But a start is being made. Some are learning to use the pamphlets published by the Guild of Health, introducing the beginner to contemplative meditation by the quiet and constant repetition in the mind of a text.⁶⁴ Others are learning to use the prayer of affirmation.⁶⁵ Others are turning to what the Eastern Orthodox Church calls the Jesus Prayer and learning to centre all their prayers round a silent adoration of the Holy Name.⁶⁶ Yet none of us can be content. We do not seek visions or sensible spiritual experiences; we are not very happy about mysticism; but most of us feel we have not journeyed as far in our life of prayer as we should have done, and in the presence of some catholics we wonder if we are missing something. Would it not be true that what we miss is comparable to the contemplative prayer, to which in however elementary a degree, every catholic is at least partially introduced?

No one can ever be satisfied with his own prayers, nor should any Christian tradition, least of all our own, be complacent about its method of prayer. But when all has been said, no one is likely to improve on Abbot Chapman's re-iterated counsel: "Pray as you can, and do not try to pray as you can't";⁶⁷ or on Forsyth's scathing

warning against praying in court-dress: "Pray as your actual self, not as some fancied saint". This we must try to do, whatever our way of prayer.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ op. cit., p. 7. ⁸⁹ Grou, pp. 60, 61, 90. ⁹⁰ Kirk, p. 440. ⁹¹ Forsyth, pp. 28, 82, 84, 90f. ⁹² Grou, p. 64. ⁹³ Heiler, p. 254. ⁹⁴ op. cit. p. 86. ⁹⁵ von Hugel: *The Life of Prayer*, p. 36. ⁹⁶ Chapman, p. 99. ⁹⁷ op. cit., p. 39f. ⁹⁸ op. cit., pp. 160, 43. ⁹⁹ Forsyth, p. 20. ¹⁰⁰ Heiler, p. 235. ¹⁰¹ W. Graham Scroggie: *Method in Prayer*, pp. 14, 17. ¹⁰² op. cit., p. 156. ¹⁰³ op. cit., p. 114. ¹⁰⁴ op. cit., p. 46. ¹⁰⁵ op. cit., p. 177. ¹⁰⁶ Deitrich Bonhoeffer: *Letters and Papers from Prison*, pp. 86, 91. ¹⁰⁷ George F. Macleod: *Only One Way Left*, pp. 152, 155. ¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Martin Jarrett-Kerr: *The Hope of Glory*, p. 47. ¹⁰⁹ e.g. *The Way of Contemplative Meditation, Introduction to Contemplative Meditation, Stillness and Strength*, all by M. V. Dunlop. ¹¹⁰ See *A New Way to Prayer, or, The Prayer of Affirmation*, by W. Mauleverer (published by Arthur James). ¹¹¹ See *On the Invocation of the Name of Jesus*, by a Monk of the Eastern Church (published by The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius). ¹¹² op. cit., p. 109. ¹¹³ op. cit., pp. 64, 66.

Seventeenth-century Teaching on the Christian Life—II

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LOVE AND FAITH

WE start, again, from common ground. Our three teachers, Francis de Sales, Richard Baxter and John Owen, all agree that love to God is the supreme and ultimate Christian virtue, and all accept the traditional Christian view of its nature. They conceive of love, as such, as an active attitude of the whole rational nature, mind, will and affections together, responding to the attraction of apprehended good. That which is good is also delightful and desirable, and love is precisely delight in it, and desire for possession of it and union with it. Human love is thus correlative to manifested attractiveness. It expresses itself in approbation of its object, in the setting of affection upon it and adherence to it, and in benevolence towards it—i.e., desire for its well-being. All our love is a form of this fundamental attitude. Now, say our teachers, we are made and redeemed to love God. This love is our end and fulfilment; it is both our duty and our happiness—"both work and wages" (Baxter, *Practical Works*, 1838 ed., III. 22). Christian life, at its heart, is a matter of loving God—delighting in Him, longing for Him, cleaving to Him, praising Him, obeying Him, giving Him glory. A few quotations will give evidence of our instructors' agreement on this. Francis opens his *Introduction* by defining "devotion" as "nothing else than the true love of God", "the perfection of love," and, as such, "the queen of virtues" (I. i, ii); and in the Preface to the *Treatise* he tells us: "In the Church of God all is of love, in love, to love, and for love." It is "love to Himself," writes Owen, "which the eternal love of God aims at in us, and works us up unto" (*Works*, II. 24). Baxter in a striking