August 7, 2009—Our Spiritual PDA—The “Irrelevance” of Prayer—Part II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00 – 6:05</td>
<td>Coffee &amp; Donuts—Opening Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:05 – 7:00</td>
<td>Christian prayer is grounded in the very specific conception of God: a personal God who encounters his creatures in love.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) Two important questions about prayer:
   a) Given the demands of a busy, involved Christian life in the world, is prayer really relevant, or is it a luxury which only contemplative monks and nuns can afford?
   b) Given the absolute dominion and concern of the God of the Old and New Testaments, can prayer be “relevant” when he will surely accomplish his plan in the world?

re·le·vance:³

• Practical and especially social applicability.
• The ability (as of an information retrieval system) to retrieve material that satisfies the needs of the user

2) To the second question…

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

--A.W. Tozer

a) Nature of God as He relates to us
   i) Watchmaker (this modern deist position was unknown in ancient times)
   ii) Puppeteer (early Jewish understanding of God)
      (1) 1 Samuel 11:6; 16:14-23
      (2) Judges 9:23
   iii) Father of mature children (progressive revelation resulted in a new view of

---

¹ From Green, *Opening to God*. Ch 2  
² Ibid. 36.  
our relationship to God)

(1) Human example
   (a) Think of how your relationship changes with your child as s/he matures into an adult

(2) Our maturing-in-Christ is expected
   (a) Hebrews 5:11-14; 1Corinthians 3:1-2

(3) In this sense, we are not left alone to our own devices (watchmaker God)
   nor are we subject to the fatalism of a puppeteer God

(4) What images of relating to God does this father-of-adult-children God conjure up for you?

b) Life as an adult believer gets more complex!

   Along with the divine voice there is another voice, the voice of sin (Genesis 4:7), the voice of Satan, God’s opponent. This voice, likewise, is somewhat mysterious. Now, it seems to arise from the heart of the man, to express his own desire (Genesis 6:5; Exodus 32:9; Deuteronomy 32:20; Psalm 95:10); again, it is clear that the voice does not come from within man himself, but from a source that is disquieting—more rational and stronger than he, more tenacious, more aware of his plans, better informed than he regarding his tendencies of his own heart, and, apparently, capable of understanding divine purposes (Genesis 3)

   As a result, man is plunged into a three-fold darkness. God commands without being seen [voice 1]; Satan conceals himself, suggests more than he affirms, proposes more than he demands. He is skilful in unleashing dreams to make reality forgotten. [voice 2]

   Finally, there is darkness in man himself [voice 3] who is incapable of seeing his own heart clearly, incapable of grasping completely the seriousness of his actions and the results deriving from them (Exodus 32:21; 2Samuel 12:7).  

   c) How do I recognize (discern) this voice?
   i) John 10:1-5

      Have you been asking God what He is going to do? He will never tell you. God does not tell you what He is going to do; He reveals to you Who He is.

      The ultimate goal of prayer is not that we would enjoy a good feeling but that we would mature in humility, advance in faith, hope, and love, and grow in our capacity to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. This comes not by an act of our will but by an encounter with God himself. And somehow, mysteriously, when our prayers are dry, Christ is present to us in a manner that is transforming...And what we learn, experientially, is that Jesus does not just give us food and drink; he is our food and drink. What we experience is not just the voice of Jesus but Jesus himself.

4 Discernment of Spirits. 17-18.
5 My Utmost for His Highest. January 2.
6 The Voice of Jesus. 178.
7 The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. A.1.4.3
…love effects a likeness between the lover and the loved.\textsuperscript{7}

d) As we develop a deeper, loving relationship with Christ, we become more like Him; we take on His character. We become more attentive and attuned to the Spirit working in our lives.

\textbf{NOTE:} We do not become like Him in the sense that we have no more need of Him; rather, Jesus becomes increasingly alive in us (Galatians 2:20). This is where the father-of-adult-children metaphor breaks down.

| 7:00 | Closing Prayer |
Further reading:

- The Bible
The martyric spirit of the martyrs themselves and the monastics after them is not driven and sustained by a wise teacher, but rather by the God Who is Life and Who offers that Life to us through His salvific economy in His Church. In the Eunomian understanding of language, applied terms or names reveal the very essence of a being, and in this case, of God Himself. Those objects which transcend all conception, and to demonstrate the feebleness of the human intellect in the face of ultimate reality, he challenges such a man to explain even the reality of created things: "Let, then, the man who boasts that he has attained the knowledge of real existence, interpret to us the real nature of the most trivial object that is before our eyes, that by what is. Paul’s prayer mentioned here was for all of the Christians in Philippi as well as for the other Christians that eventually would read his epistle, as he wanted them to be filled with love, knowledge, and discernment from the Lord. Paul knew that as young followers of Christ they needed the guiding of the Holy Spirit as well as an extra measure of discernment in spiritual matters. Many of them would face persecution and trials, like he was experiencing, so he wanted to encourage them to seek God’s wisdom in all circumstances. My final verse about wisdom and discernment is found here in the book of James, because it is a wonderful definition of what these words mean. James confirms what others have written about the origin of wisdom: it comes from our God above. God’s energies, which are God Himself, permeate all His creation, and we experience them in the form of deifying grace and divine light. Truly our God is a God who hides Himself, yet He is also a God who acts the God of history, intervening directly in concrete situations. 3. God is personal, that is to say, Trinitarian. This God who acts is not only a God of energies, but a personal God. Orthodox Trinitarian theology has a personal principle of unity, but the west finds its unitary principle in the essence of God. In Latin Scholastic theology, so it seems to Orthodox, the persons are overshadowed by the common nature, and God is thought of not so much in concrete and personal terms, but as an essence in which various relations are distinguished.