August 7, 2009—Our Spiritual PDA—The “Irrelevance” of Prayer<sup>1</sup>—Part II

<table>
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<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>6:00 – 6:05</td>
<td>Coffee &amp; Donuts—Opening Prayer</td>
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<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.&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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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?

rel·ev·ance:<sup>3</sup>
   • 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) 1Samuel 11:6; 16:14-23
          (2) Judges 9:23
      iii) Father of mature children (progressive revelation resulted in a new view of

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<sup>1</sup> From Green, *Opening to God*. Ch 2
<sup>2</sup> 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 skillful 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 to 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.

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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.\(^7\)

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.

**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
God is the sole creator and ruler of the Universe. Conceptions of God can vary widely among various religions, though the Bible has about the only definition that can be completely defended logically. (Not including certain liberalistic and/or allegorical interpretations.) Theologians and philosophers have studied countless conceptions of God since the dawn of civilization. The question of the existence of God classically falls under the branch of philosophy known as metaphysics, but is also one of GOD’S WORD® Translation All creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal who his children are. New American Standard 1977 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. Webster's Bible Translation For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. Weymouth New Testament For all creation, gazing eagerly as if with outstretched neck, is waiting and longing to see the manifestation of the sons of God. World English Bible For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’ Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called ‘sons of God’. The Christian knows a God who is personal, yet who, as Creator, infinitely transcends his creature. God is wholly other than man. It is also crucial to Christian prayer that God engages man's whole being in response, not just his interior life. In the view of centering prayer, the immanence of God somehow makes the transcendence of God available to human techniques and experience. Centering prayer is essentially a form of self-hypnosis. By it, we are given a share in the very holiness of God. Sanctifying grace is God's communication of himself to man. As such, it cannot be experienced by human faculties. Centering prayer claims for itself the experience of God, while setting aside external realities and overcoming the "otherness" of God.