

## A RESPONSE (I) TO DOCTOR FORD

Doctor Ford provides us with insightful reflections on the human dispositions requisite for Christian prayer. These dispositions include love, independence, personal integrity, freedom, creative activity, empathy with others, responsibility, psychological freedom, openness to experience, adaptability, trust in one's own being, life fully lived at each moment. She elucidates these dispositions for prayer, which she at times expands to include dispositions for the spiritual life, by referring to the thought structures of Fromm, Rogers, Joyce, and Kübler-Ross. She also notes negative or deviant human dispositions which hinder prayer: extinguishing personal initiative, excessive dependency on leaders, conformity, lingering in a period of romance.

The thrust of her reflections, with which I am in agreement, is the point that Christian prayer blends with the humanizing process, that genuine human dispositions are required for Christian prayer, that Christian prayer is not inimical to the humanizing process, and conversely that the humanizing process is not inimical to Christian prayer.

I would judge, however, that her discussion of the negative dispositions of prayer is too much determined by the deviations which she detects in the Ann Arbor—South Bend Catholic neo-Pentecostal prayer groups. I would note, too, that while it is important to point up the dying process as a humanizing experience not inimical to prayer, one might question whether it is proper methodologically to illustrate the stages of dying enumerated by Kübler-Ross by referring to passages from Scripture which do not pertain precisely to these psychological stages, e.g., the stages of dying in Job and Jesus.

Doctor Ford has chosen to concentrate on the human dispositions of prayer, those that aid and those that hinder prayer. She might have chosen to explore or to explore further other areas: 1) What precisely is Christian prayer? 2) What problems are conjoined with the views of prayer as interpersonal relationship and dialogue, especially today when prayer seems like a monologue and God seems to be the great Silence? 3) In what way can Jesus be called a model

of prayer and humanness? How is his situation different from ours or how is it the same? 4) Granted that Christian prayer is not inimical to the humanizing process, how are the two related to each other? How do the two in fact blend? How open or oriented is man to prayer. 5) Dr. Ford presupposes that prayer is humanizing, but how precisely does Christian prayer aid in the humanizing process of man? How does prayer bring about the human which she identifies? Does prayer constitute the fullest development of the humanizing process? Since this fifth area seems to be demanded by the title of the paper and is little explored by Doctor Ford herself, it might be profitable to outline some humanizing factors of prayer.

To speak of the humanizing factors of Christian prayer is to recognize that something happens to man in prayer. It is to suppose that when the Spirit of God intercedes with God in the heart of man (cf. Rm 8: 26), man is not passive but freely turns his full being to the mysterious and transcendent experience taking place within him. It is to suppose that prayer engages the whole man in the exercise of his highest powers. Prayer is not an action of the Spirit of God alone, nor of the spirit of man alone. Prayer involves all the powers of man and directs them to the most sublime of human activities.

To speak of the humanizing qualities of prayer is to introduce the whole question of "the human." What is it to be man? Is man perfectible? Is there a model according to which we can judge whether or not he is becoming more human? Is it true that in the long run man can be humanized? The contention of this paper is that man—the individual man and the community of men—is perfectible, that man can become more human. It is contended that prayer (among other agents) can perfect man in the realm of the human.

How does prayer humanize man? If we are to answer this question in a Christian context, we must view man in his God-directed situation. Man as he presently exists is constituted by a relationship to the Beyond (to select one way of referring to God) in the midst of this life and universe. He is so constituted whether he reflects on the issue or not. Man is situated by the Beyond, especially by the personal intensity and enfleshment of God in Jesus Christ. Man cannot but be related to this Beyond. He cannot be defined except in relation to this Beyond.

We contend that in a Christian belief framework man becomes nearer his real self in this universe the more he consciously and genuinely relates to the Beyond which is present as the center of his life. We contend that Christian prayer is man's conscious and express relating to the Beyond. Prayer is man's verbal, mental or attitudinal sign of the Beyond. The more genuine the orational sign the more actual the relationship to the Beyond. The more actual the relationship the more man reaches his deepest human dimension. Prayer humanizes man by setting him ever more directly in relationship to the most significant Other in his life. It matters not whether the prayer is one of petition, of praise, or of simple silence. Any of the manifold Christian types of prayer can put man in touch with his deepest self. Prayer, then, becomes the gauge of the Christian's humanness because it is the gauge of his relationship to God. The most genuine man is the one who is most actually and expressly related to the Beyond in his midst. Prayer effects and gauges the quality of his humanness.

Prayer is also humanizing as the unifying experience of the Christian man's life. It is principally in prayer that the Christian attempts to put it all together for himself. The evils of the day, the puzzlements of events, the joys of discovery all find their faith resolution in prayer. Prayer pulls the myriads of daily experiences together and relates them to the Beyond. Prayer puts perspective in the routine and extraordinary events of life. It centers them in the Beyond. It gives each its place in relationship to the whole. Prayer aligns human life in the direction of maximum humanization. Christian prayer does not dissipate the mysterious and puzzling dimensions of life but it provides unifying direction and singleness of hope.

The humanizing qualities of Christian prayer also involve the community. The humanized man is perfected for community in the realm of understanding and co-operation. Self-reflective prayer examines our relationship to the world of men. In prayerful attention and in the presence of God we ponder our relationships to the people around us: our failings in conversation with them; our misunderstandings and pre-judgments; our lack of consideration; our reluctance to put ourselves out for the other person; our self-seeking at the idol of success. Prayer is a source of power for community

relationships; it is a healing power that results from the blend of the power of Jesus Christ and of the attention of the person steeped in prayer. It is productive for the self and the community.

The ultimate humanizing aspects of prayer are as unverifiable empirically as the Beyond itself in the midst of life. There will always be something of the foolish in prayer just as there is something of the foolish in belief in God or belief in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. There will always be something of the risk and unclear in prayer, just as there is something of risk and unclarity in faith. Ultimately it will not be possible to prove empirically, even to oneself, that prayer is an agent of humanization. A person may grow in dedication to community, peace and justice but it cannot be proved that these proceed precisely from Christian prayer. Generally the acknowledgement of the deep humanizing effect of prayer will be the result of a faith commitment, insight, and dedication rather than of scientific proof. Prayer in a "scientific world" tends to appear as foolishness. In the last analysis, prayer and its quality of humanization will never receive a completely satisfying answer. While appealing, prayer will ever remain in the realm of the mysterious.

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