

A RESPONSE (II) TO DOCTOR FORD

Doctor Ford's paper ranges widely over the theme of prayer and humanization. As I have little experience of Pentecostalism and still less of dying, my remarks will not touch directly on these two sizable portions of her discourse. I would prefer to linger, more reflectively than critically, on the rather basic point with which her paper begins, but which she does not systematically develop.

Doctor Ford speaks of an innate suitability of God for man and of man for God. God is not a threat to man, nor man to God. Man is humanized by being divinized. It is both a fruit and condition of prayer that man be and become himself, his real self. Let me develop a few theses or headlines around this aspect of our theme.

That God is most God, *Deus semper maior*, when man is fully man, *Gloria Dei vivens homo*, is a truth which is articulated in the Christian and especially in the Catholic tradition in a hundred different ways. The doctrines of creation, of providence, of the Incarnation, of the mediational role of Mary, of grace, of the sacraments, can be developed in such a way as to highlight this basic paradox inherent in the Christian mystery. Karl Rahner enunciates the truth impressively as follows: "God alone can make something which has validity even in his own presence. There lies the mystery of that active creation which is God's alone. Radical dependence upon him increases in direct, and not in inverse, proportion with genuine self-coherence before him" (*Theological Investigations I*, 162).

Christian prayer, then, may be viewed as the personal and experiential counterpart of such doctrinal reflections on God and man. What we experience in prayer is that God our loving Father permits us to be ourselves in the very process of calling and causing us to be.

Nevertheless,—and is the theologian not called more frequently to a "nevertheless" than to a "therefore"?—the experience of prayer, like the doctrinal affirmations I have mentioned, contains *also* an experience of dependence, obedience, painful renunciation of an illusory autonomy. If God is the one who lets us be in the very process of causing us to be, he is nonetheless no merely permissive God.

As his creatures, and especially as sinners, there is a yoke to be borne, a submission to be accepted. To adapt Bonhoeffer's adage: only he who is free obeys, but also: only he who obeys is truly free. There is no discipleship without discipline. This theme could, I think, be richly illustrated from Scripture, from the psalms, for example, or from the example of Jesus himself (cf. *entolé*, "commandment," in the fourth Gospel).

But the Christian experience of prayer is an experience of God that is intrinsically social in character. The organic unity of love of God and love of man forbids us a mere juxtaposition of the Godward and manward directedness of Christian faith. God's presence to us is mediated through the Christian community. And so our experience of community, which is not something outside of prayer (because it is not something outside of faith) will include, to the degree that it is genuine, an experience of freedom and an experience of dependency.

Because the Christian community is not God and is in fact a sinful community, it does not have the uniquely divine power to constitute the Christian in a radical freedom by the very fact of radical dependence. But when it is true to itself, it will image forth to its members the divine invitation to be true to their inner selves. The implications of this role, especially for those who bear authority in the Church, could be developed at length. Woe to that community, woe to that bearer of office in the Church, who scandalize the little ones by an oppressive yoke.

Nevertheless—that word again—woe also to the Christian who in the name of personal freedom refuses the discipline of discipleship within the Christian community. And woe to the community itself when it succumbs to a false permissivity and betrays its members by abdicating that essential work of love, the work of fraternal correction. The oft misquoted dictum of Augustine, "Love and do what you will," was originally uttered in the context of fraternal correction. Today, I think, after a period in which, quite legitimately, Christians have been breaking out of excessive restraints and controls in the matter of prayer and community, many are rediscovering that, in prayer and in community, there is no genuine discipleship without discipline.

What am I saying, then? I am saying, with Doctor Ford, that man is humanized by being divinized, in a process that is both constitutive of true freedom and corrective of a pseudo-freedom. And I am saying that man is humanized in the process of being "ecclesialized," a process of growth in discipleship that is not only fostering but also corrective.

Finally, there is the question of how one can tell, in his struggle of love with God and with the community, when it is time for complaint and protest and refusal, and when it is time for humble submission to the yoke of discipline. A great deal could be said on this subject, especially regarding the attitudes called for on the part of both individual and community, and regarding the mutuality of the supporting and corrective aspects of covenant. Ultimately, it is a question of shared discernment. There is no way of guaranteeing that truth will prevail. The minimum to which we pledge ourselves in our covenant with God and man is that, when the moment of crisis comes, we will meet it in prayer, and in a discerning process which is appropriately shared with the community.

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