

How ordinary the Lord's Prayer! It's about the basic daily needs. Food and drink. Valuing ("hallowing," "sanctifying"). Yearning ("...come,...be done..."). Restoring of relationships ("forgive"). Security from inner/outer evils ("lead us not... deliver us"). The LP is "ordinary," thus, in the sense of the liturgy, ie, as antonym of "proper": the usual, in contrast to the special. But my daily use of the LP --as that of millions of other Christians--is to make the ordinary special, to see-and-celebrate what I've often called the holy in the common, and thus my word "extra/ordinary" in this thinksheet's title....The thinksheet's immediate prompting is an upcoming conversation on Hospice and spirituality.

1. Yes, the LP is common--but how uncommon, extraordinary! God's fire descending upon Elijah's altar, the dove descending upon Jesus in baptism and his followers at Pentecost (occasions of washing and eating). A brief verbal dance of human Centering around the Promising Presence.
2. In the double sanctification--of the Extraordinary, the (Holy) Name; and of the ordinary, the everyday--Jewish and Christian spirituality do not differ. To put it historically, Christianity when true to Jesus and thus to itself does not, in this way of uniting earth and heaven, depart from Judaism. And to put it critically, both Christianity and Judaism are self-destructive and heretical to whatever extent they at any time and place deviate from the double sanctification.
3. So Jews and Christians, in Hospice ministry, are engaged in the same basic spiritualization of that extra/ordinary thing called death, whose only parallel experience is that extra/ordinary thing called birth. How can we help all involved not only think and believe, but also experience, that a Higher Business is going on not apart from, but along with and in, the quite ordinary and often repulsive lower business of biological cessation?
4. Those who think no Higher Business is going on can yet participate in Hospice as caring, compassionate human beings: I have no authority to rule out thoroughgoing naturalists! But participants intending to be faithful Jews and faithful Christians have a bond and sphere of discourse that ought to make conversation on dying and death and decisions pertinent thereto quite natural and mutually enriching; for they worship the One God, source and reference of the Higher Business.... Those who otherwise conceive the Higher Business, eg Buddhists, are closer to the Christian-and-Jewish conversation than are those who think no Higher Business is going on even though the latter have roots in Judaism and Christianity.
5. In Judaism and Christianity, the Higher Business presses for verbalization: "I live as a witness," as Paul put it (Acts 20.25 in Zink's German translation; in the Greek and Latin, "I went around preaching"--so Zink's "Ich lebte als Zeuge" has heightened the meaning, making Paul's speaking for the Kingdom of God not just his activity but his being and *raison d'être*--a fact I noticed in devotion this morning, 28 July 86). Yet paradoxically, Jewish/Christian conversation, easy because we share the double sanctification, is both easier and harder because Christians use so many Jewish words with references and even feelings Jews cannot uncritically accept. Many ways to put the paradox. Eg, we are one faith but two religions; or we are of one spirituality but two devotions; or we are of one basic way of seeing the world but of two communities living significantly differently in it. My experience, however, is that the more we get down to cases (eg, the case of this person who is dying and those caring for this person and one another) and away from abstractions, the easier the Jewish/Christian conversation gets.

OVER

6. If Christians are honest (without being which they cannot be faithful), they will acknowledge and practice, verbally, the differentiating fact that separates them from Jews--viz, what I may call the Lord Jesus fact. For both Jews and Christians, God is with us ("Immanu-el") in our living and dying: for us Christians, God is also with us as us, as one of us--the most extraordinary instance, the unique instance, of the Extraordinary in the ordinary--the Incarnation. Here we Jews and Christians could not be farther apart: what for "them" is blasphemy is for us grace, God's ultimate self-revelation in a history-long series of self-revealings as Creator-Carer-Judge (beginning of the Letter to the Hebrews, eg). And just as Jews are commissioned to verbal witness as "a light to the nations," we Christians are commissioned to verbal witness on behalf of the Lord Jesus. But "let me count the ways"! A person is a word, presence is a statement; but who is this who is present, and why? Jesus was/is the Word; but that reality can be known, generation after generation, only through words pointing to deeds. The patient has a right to know whether you are on Higher Business, and if so how you see it: you have a Christian (or Jewish) duty to say how you see it. But suppose, after that, the patient wants nothing more said about any Higher Business. Then the patient's way of handling the Higher Business, the way of silence, is to be honored--unless at some point the patient signals the desire to break silence. Sound and silence are coministers of the Divine.

7. Is a Hospice language--a tradition-neutral and appropriate way of speaking--possible? Yes (as, eg, my expression "the Higher Business") and no (for we cannot create rootless holy-words, symbols of the transcendent). Henry Beston wrote a Cape Cod classic, THE OUTERMOST HOUSE, in which he uses language suspended between heaven and earth yet partaking wholeheartedly of both while poetically avoiding language from any particular religious tradition--an analog for Hospice language about death, the outermost earthly human experience. I hope the analog does not go further: his house finally fell into the ocean long after his great book fell into print.

8. While not all Hospice workers believe in a Higher Business, all will acknowledge that death is itself Another Business, something uniquely extraordinary breaking into ordinary human life. All Hospice workers are dealing with spirituality insofar as spirituality always and everywhere includes the human response to the limits of life, and especially that limit we must experience as falling off the final edge and ledge (no matter what, or whether, any conception of an afterlife). Hospice workers, more than do the general populace, become familiar with death and are tempted to see it (as are all in the medical professions) as common, ordinary, daily. What should be the spiritual ministry to, as well as of, Hospice workers, so that they can--to their best--experience (1) the extra/ordinary tension vis-a-vis death and (2) the optimal distance (objectivity, but also "it tolls for thee")?

9. A 12-year-old Jewish girl confessed to her rabbi, fearfully, "Maybe I don't believe in God." How relieved she was to hear him say, "Now you're thinking!" Well, as human being and artist and poet, that little girl, though now in a woman's body, has been thinking and loving and worshipping the Holy in the common in the form of what on the surface are children's books. M.B.Goffstein can teach us to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, inner space in ordinary spaces, how to enlighten lightly (with a light touch), how to signal the Higher Business with utterly simple (nonjargony and "nonreligious") words, how to call back from memory as Mystery the magical quality of our childhood's experiences, the reverent stroking of the ordinary till the Extraordinary peeks out. She and Annie Dillard are sources for Hospice training.