

is the title of a paper "prepared for use in Course SL 640, Prayer, at Western Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Oregon," by the teacher, longtime close friend of mine, Francis Whiting, who asked me to comment on it....The reader need not have a copy of the unpublished manuscript: I quote all you need to know. My following his numbering is only for his personal reference....A master of spiritualia & man of prayer, Francis often says things in a way as fresh as simple. Fresh, not new. In prayer, there's nothing new except what you've forgotten & are grateful to be reminded of....In what's below, I think more of his words than of mine, & would be happy if you too do.

1 "Prayer is a major discipline in Christian thought....A theology is an intellectual building. Like a physical building, a theology is a theology....[Here is] my particular building, my particular structure of prayer."...E (the sign for my comments): "A theology of prayer" is not an oxymoron: use your head about what your heart does.

2 Some materials you use in your prayer-building are givens, common to prayer. The disciples (L.11.1) knew that Jn.Baptist & Jesus shared commons, but "they certainly expected personal elements" in each....E: Our prayers should be some fixed (borne to us by angels from great pray-ers of the past) & free (that the marriage of our heart & mind, as Tennyson put it, "make one music").....(You are right: my comment is not tight to the quotation, which set me free to do my own thing, as I pray this Thinksheet will set you free to do yours.)

5 "Prayer is the gift of response." I got nowhere "seeking God," & nobody helped me to "pneumatic theology," what the Spirit is doing in our praying. "My heart was much unimproved." My Christian communities, one after another, expected me to pray but did not help me to "personal theology," direct experiencing of God + understanding what I was doing, & what was happening, when I was at prayer. "I felt on the margins of it all."....E: From our 59-year friendship, I can confirm everything Brother Francis is saying here & throughout this paper.

6 "I wanted 'god life.' I was aware of a kind of Great Something. It had to do somehow with God."

7 "A shy fellow,...I was afraid that my asking questions would be interpreted as unbelief." It was "a sad, tragic agony" that "one had to be perfect," & "ignorance was sinful!" "Eventually I learned that God was present and that my praying, for I did pray, was--and is--a gift. A gift of God. A charism. A Pentecostal event and a series of such events."

8 "From within my deepest being this little poem" "rose up": "I called to Him / and found my plea / the echo of / His calling me."....E: "We love [him, God] because he first loved us" (1Jn.4.19 NRSV, the [] being in footnote).

9 "My heart had learned...a description of theocentric life, a statement of the basis of prayer,...saving dynamic. I found out that God was present to me" & I to God, "and that God was the God of my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

10 "The Lord is in this place--and I did not know it" (Gn.28.17). My spiritual journey had not been "self-initiated."

11 "We need to share our intimate Christian experience."....E: What we fail to witness to (1) is an incomplete reality, for we are persons-in-community, & (2) fades away, from lack of interpersonal reinforcement.

13 "Charis [in Greek] plus the resultant ending *ma* makes the word *charisma* or *charism* which means a gift of grace, a result of the operation of grace." I had received from God [in the Spirit] "the charism of prayer."

14 "Charis [here now, an English word] is God personally present and acting effectively....God comes to us and elicits our response. That is the gift of prayer."

15 On the same root as charis are *chara* (joy, delight), a short verb meaning to rejoice, & a long verb meaning to pardon or show kindness. Charis itself means, in addition to grace, "graciousness, attractiveness, favor, goodwill." Besides, the root has a self reference (Kittel) "self-being in self-transport,...harmony in self-

rejoicing." So I say, "*chara* is God's joyous satisfaction in himself....when we experience the grace, the *charis* of God, we experience God himself."

16 "When I am moved to pray I experience grace....the presence of God in effective action and power....an empiricism of the spirit."

17 "Prayer is engendered by the Spirit of God,....the Holy Spirit." Jn.1.9. "Prayer has its foundation in the person, the presence, the providence, the power of God. Prayer is an enabled response."

18 What one day the Lord said to Pascal has helped me: "You would not seek me if you had not found me."....E: "Before they call I will answer" (Is.65.24a).

19 "The Creator is the Divine Seeker, the Divine Lover."

20 "My second foundational surety: I find myself in a loving community, that is, a universe of love." Dante's DIVINE COMEDY ends "But at last my will and my desire-- / Like a wheel moving evenly--were revolving / From the love that moves the sun and all the stars." Dante's answer to the question Is the universe friendly? "Love's opposite....brings us into the milieu of mystery. But it is love's mystery."

21 "My prayers are validated by love [even in the presence of love's opposite]. The presence of God is the presence of love. The answer to the problem of evil is the ultimate triumph of love, the love of God made known in our Lord Jesus." Ro.8.31-39. "Prayer is the way we live in this realm of mystery and triumph. Prayer is love in action in a universe ultimately validated by love."

22 As he begins his MY SEARCH FOR ABSOLUTES, Paul Tillich admits "the victory of relativism in all realms of thought and life today," but counters with this: "There is something that resists the stream of relativities." (Whiting:) "Yes! Love conquers relativities and places us in a community of certitude, the community of the love of God."

23 "While I am certain in my mind that the Lord hears the prayers of his estranged children, I am also certain that to become a member of the divine community enlarges our understanding and capacity for prayer."

24 "I do not in any way minimize the importance of the mental and verbal aspects of prayer, but I am most concerned about the personal, organic, ontic aspects of prayer."

25 Ontic: "the nature and function of being, of isness, of spirit." God's self-appellation "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex.3.14-15; of Jesus, Jn.8.58). The Greek for "I am," *eimi*, sounds like "I'm"! Over many icons of God or Jesus, [Greek] *ho on*, "I am."

26 The Christian is a created & regenerated *being* ("born from above," Jn.3.3 NRSV; compare 1P.1.23). "The Christian has an ontological relation to God--that of child to father. A child has many ways of relating to parents and the Christian has many ways of relating to God and all those ways may be called prayer....Prayer is personal relationship."

28 "The Christian has entered a new existence" where "prayer is an 'inside job'" (Jn.1.12-13, where the Greek phrase for "children of God" can be rendered "of godlike nature": "Prayer is one of the ways in which we express our godlike nature").

29 Russ. Orthodox philosopher-theologian (& friend of Dostoievsky) Vladimir Solovieff (d.1900) coined the Russ. equivalent of the word "Godmanhood," which summarizes an Orthodox [Greek, Russian, Eastern Christian] teaching called "theosis," the process of becoming the children of God, sharing the divine nature: being born again "implies being endued with the Holy Spirit."....E: The Bible's only reference to theosis is 2P.1.4 (NRSV: "participants of the divine nature").

30 "Being baptized in water and Spirit (Jn.3.5) are the two sides of the same coin. The physical rite and the spiritual reality are conjoined and bring the recipient into that full relationship with the Father out of which comes, for one thing, the fullness of prayer." So "turn all of life into prayer!" (1Thes.5.17, "without

ceasing.")

31 "To live in the kingdom of God is to live in the spirit of prayer." After Jn. Woolman prayed without an interpreter, the Amerind chief, Papunehang, said he loved to feel where words come from (even without knowing their meaning). "I see this as a wonderful distinction between prayer and prayers. Prayer is the stuff out of which prayers come."

32 Prayer should "govern our living in this world. The life of God is to be our life. And through us his life is to become known and effectually active in the world. Prayer has both personal and social concerns."

33 "Attending to the Word of God" is the first mode of personal prayer as "listening to the Lord." "The Bible is the only book whose author, the Holy Spirit, lives in the heart of its reader" (idea of Wm. Barclay), helping the reader understand. "The other form of listening to the Lord is...waiting on the Lord,...eager expectation that the Lord will speak to us from his Word and in the providential circumstances of life. Such listening is prayer."

34 The Lord's guidance "will never be contrary to his Word." To help others as well as themselves, Christian leaders should have the "personal, professional authority" which cannot be had without "scholarly biblical learning." Hard work, but no excuse for incompetence. The leader should be "on [biblically] solid ground."

36 "Biblically informed prayer gives one a personal basis for leadership. Out of [such]...prayer comes...inner authority," convincing on more than "rational grounds," though rational argument has a proper place. It's "a mystical authority,...a living, breathing, pulsing thing." You can see/feel it in Jesus' words (Jn.16.13-14), "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth;...he will take what is mine and declare it to you." "This inner teaching is a matter of spiritual consciousness...that openness to the Spirit which comes from the overt attitudes and practices of prayer." With such consciousness, we may sometimes speak, as Alex. Whyte was said to have done on one occasion (in a parishioner's words), "straight from the [divine] Audience-Chamber."

38 "Prayer has much to do with social concern and concerns....Living in the climate of prayer is a genuine experience only if we find ourselves concerned with others. This is basic evangelism," which includes, but is much more than, "winning persons to Christ." Close by me for 49 years has been Thos. Kelly's A TESTAMENT OF DEVOTION [a work of a Quaker physicist]. One of its essays is "The Eternal Now and Social Concern." It speaks of "an experience of the Eternal breaking into time, which transforms all life into a miracle of faith and action. Unspeakable, profound, and full of glory as an inward experience, it is the root of concern for all creation, the true ground of social endeavor." I [Whiting] call that "the basic experience of prayer, prayer as living in the Presence of God, prayer as the awareness of that Presence and the gift of response to the Lord."

39f "The process of wondering and questioning and doubting goes on throughout life." But living in God's presence &, in the church, the presence of our fellow-believers, we come to feel "safely disturbed," because in our hearts grow "the certainties of hope" based on "the awareness that we are loved, that the Lord has sought us out. The certainties [then] outweigh the doubts and fears." "The mystery of creative and redemptive love weighs more heavily, on the scale of meaning, than the mystery of evil" (Elliott).

41 "The sense of certainty brings with it a sense of truth. And that issues in hope." Rom.8.38-39. "These convictions are far more than right conclusions based on our theology. They are that but they are also deep certitude of the heart, a way of living; and the only word which is adequate to express that, at least for me, is PRAYER."

42 "One more main concern:...prayer and creativity, prayer and the proper uses of the graces of imagination. If prayer is defined as living knowledgeably in the presence of the Spirit, and I accept that description, we are then in the Presence of loving, concerned, ultimate creativity." (Paul quotes a Greek poet [Ac.17.28]:

"In him we live and move and have our being.") "This receiving and responding or this living and moving and being, this responsible awareness, is, again, what I call basic prayer."

43 "So,...prayer is living. It gives rise to prayers." In this paper I've been laying out "my philosophy of Christian living," which basically is "a theology of prayer: that considered and constant attitude which is always responding to the deep working of the Holy Spirit, who is always seeking to bring us into conformity to the living Lord."

CLOSING COMMENTS:

1 I'm surprised at how few comments I made! What you have above is the whole paper, briefed, & little from the author's old friend Brother Willis. Dear reader, I think that will not disappoint you. Dear Francis, I hope it disappoints you not overmuch....Besides being you, your paper is splendid.

2 On the Amerind "medicine" circle, you enter by, & see all the other animals from the perspective of, your totemic animal. Imagine prayer as a circle: you enter by, & see all the other pray-er "types" from the perspective of, your personality type (1 of 16 of the Jungian Gray-Wheelwright, 1 of the 9 of the Enneagram, or...). Readers of my Thinksheets will easily note that my head is not screwed on the way Brother Francis' is, so hearing from his head--& heart--may be an episodic relief for you. Different screw-threading on heads can make for more than conversation--communion, an enriched fellowship of prayer.

3 Here a spiritually rich teacher is trying to induce his spiritually poor students to open the limitless treasury of prayer. "Though sometimes sad, always joyful,...having nothing, possessing everything" (2Cor.6.10, my translation).

Craigville MA 02636

309 L. Eltz.Dr.

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS