

Thoughts upon just having read Jn. R. Yungblut's REDISCOVERING PRAYER (Seabury/72).

1. Better on praxis than on theory--the reverse of so many current books on prayer. Anglican rector 20 years, now a Quaker, the author is more Christian-in-the-action-of prayer than his ontology-cosmology-metaphysics can support. Useful, therefore, in helping the hard-to-have-faith to get into Christian prayer-action and thus possibly act themselves into Christian believing--reversing Bp. Robinson's, whose student-days decision to cease private Christian prayer acted himself (as he says in the prayer chapter of HONEST TO GOD) out of Christian believing into God-is-dead philosophy--on which one of the bishop's priests published, five years before the Yungblut book (which does not note it), PRAYER IN THE SECULAR CITY, which reduces prayer to (a) an effulgence of human/human interaction (the 5th "way of being religious") and (b) meditation and (c) conscience-motivation for Coxian social action.

2. Current world-views variously (a) exclude prayer, (b) transform prayer (e.g., the Bp. Robinson school), and, as do traditional world-views, (c) include prayer. Yungblut is in the last group. Indeed, his book's aim is to structure a metaphysics as a back-formation from a theology of prayer, to "harmonize" (27) Christian tradition with Darwin-and-Freud ("process" thinking inclusive of, and within, the skinbag), for "additional motivation" for, and "new dimensions of," prayer (43). Direct Experience of the Holy (Streng's Way #1) is reduced to the mystic sense of Presence (and thus ahistorical (23,59,60), which makes him soft on Hinduism (14f,24,27,30,35,39,57,85,105,107,115,129,134,137ff,144): he's taken over by advaita in vedanta (nondualism: 27, 35,85, de-emphasizing divine/human discontinuities and emphasizing these continuities: mystic union, the unconscious, evolution, and ecology (104; vs. the biblical discontinuities of creation/isolation and sin/alienation) (and see other antibiblical tendencies: 44,47,124,161,177; and the use of biblical terms for nonbiblical and even antibiblical purposes: e.g., "son of man" as "man's successor" in evolution (48; transcendence in general being sucked into the intra-evolutional: 45,122). But, as does the Gospel of Jn. in its playing with undigested metaphysical bits, Y. often seems to return to earlier strata in his feeling-thinking-talking (for which I thank God, and warn the unwary reader not to assume Y's. intellectual neo-skeleton can sustain his own very real love of God (143: "the richest and deepest fulfillment of my life") and assiduous daily practice of the Presence).

3. My practice, on handling a new book, is to look first to the indices, like cutting open the fish to see what it's been eating. Y. doesn't let me: no indices. So here's my list of his gurus, arranged by me in chronological order: mystic and mystic-twisted Bible quotations, Hinduism, Eckhart (...144), Geo. Fox (20), Wm. Blake (24,160ff), Wordsworth (29,78,90,175), Darwin (...25), Freud (8f), Jung (29,107), Teilhard (6f, 27,40f,91,107,166--to whom he is obsequious; indeed, his heresies vis-a-vis orthodox Christianity are precisely those of Teilhard, so much so that the book might be titled A TEILHARDIAN VERSION OF PRAYER). Apparently no awareness that Wieman (whom he doesn't mention) covered much of this territory (44) in his naturalistic theism, which Y. calls "mystical humanism" (52), Y's. own reduction of Way #1 into Way #4 (mysticism) combined with Way #5 (interpersonal) and Way #8 (sensuous experience)--his eco-interest (36) makes me think of calling his position "ecomysticism," with "he is me" (139) antidualism, which is (in spite of Eckhart) blasphemy in Western religion.

4. Definitions of prayer: 26,38,45,51,59....Good list of hindrances to prayer today: 5f....Human Potential confused with divine potential, but creatively (as what "wants out," 50, on which cp. the Buddhist-Christian mysticism of Kazantzakis): 116,123 (Esalen), 124,129 (intercession as the best sensitivity training)....NEEDS (esp. 53): "rhythmic solitude...close to nature" (53), "a good analyst for at least a year" (55), reading of sacred texts and contemporary mystic-type science-and-philosophy material (56f,73), intentional group (56), "devote time regularly" (60), spiritual director-confessor (110) + confession to God (114f), dream interpretation (146), yoga (150).

8. Excellent on adoration: Limited to God; our duty in evolution (155ff)....9. God defined (44), "person-like" (60).

5. To life's meridian, one seeks integrity through identity: INTEGRATION (17,38,54f,112f (on pseudo-integration), 137f,152,167)....6. I should add one more author in the fish's belly: ecomystic Loren Eiseley (52), a spiritual Darwin (50) with Hindu flavor (80). And see 105....7. "Disentangling the voice" (10).