

RELIGIONS / ADYĀN

A Scholarly Journal Published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue

Religions/Adyān is an annual and bi-lingual (English and Arabic) publication in interfaith studies published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue with an emphasis on interreligious dialogue and the relations between Islam and other faiths.

In a world of religious misunderstandings, violence, and hijacking of religious faiths by political ideologies, Religions/Adyān intends to provide a welcome space of encounter and reflection upon the commonalities and shared goals of the great religions of the world. The title of the journal suggests religious diversity while suggesting the need to explore this diversity in order to develop keys to both a deepening of one's own faith and a meaningful opening to other creeds. The Qur'ān suggests a commonality of faith and a striving for the Truth within the context of religious diversity:

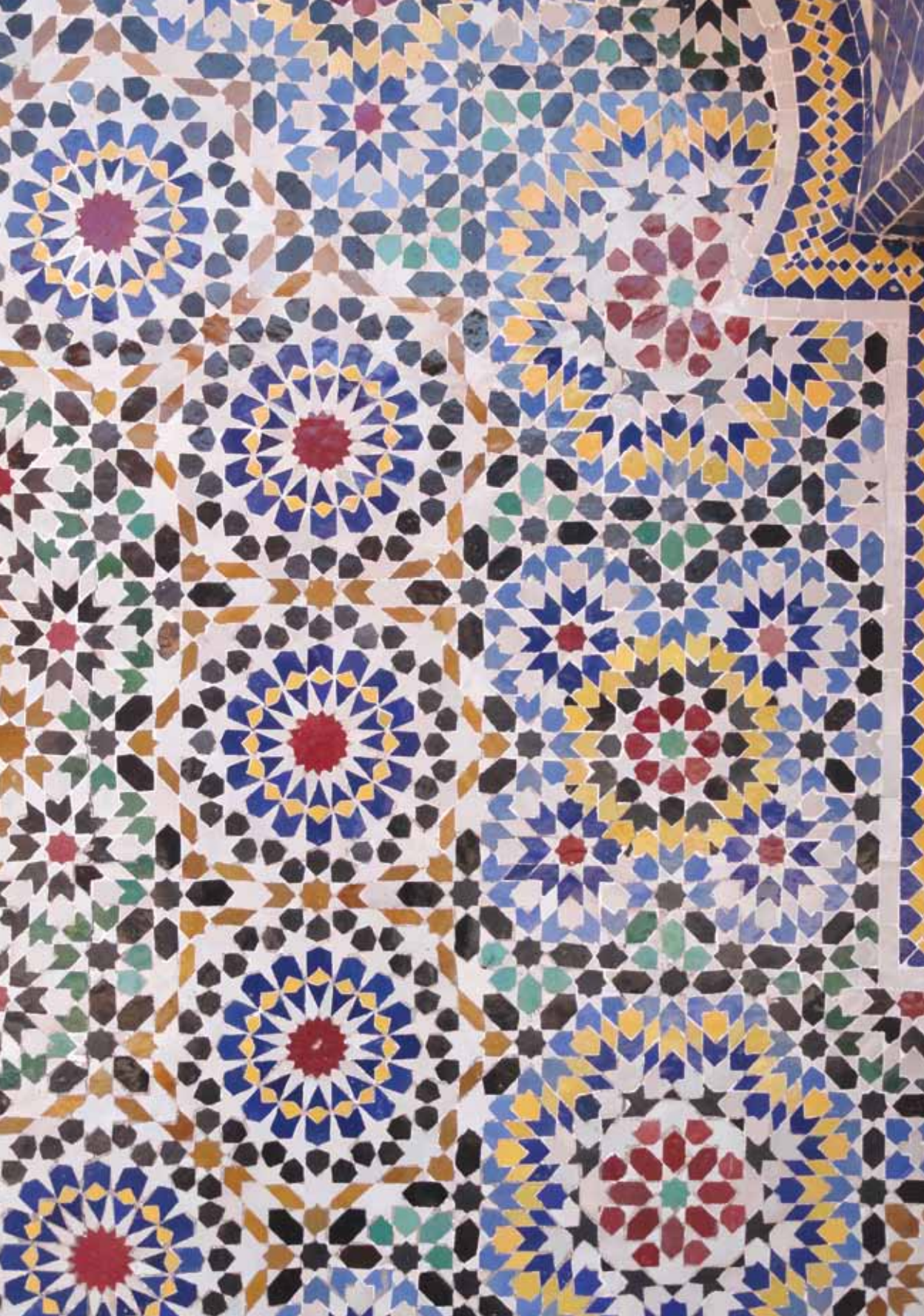
"To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute." (The Table Spread 5:48, version of Yusuf Ali)

As a refereed international publication published the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, Religions/Adyān finds its inspiration in the universal message of monotheism broadly understood, while engaging the various religious faiths that share common principles and values within this broadly defined context.

Religions/Adyān encourages comparative studies and interreligious exchanges in a spirit of dialogue and mutual enrichment. Its aim is to promote understanding between religious faithful of various traditions by exploring and studying the rich field of their theological and spiritual common grounds, their mutual and constructive relationships, past, present and potentially future, a better understanding of the causes of their conflicts, and the current challenges of their encounter with atheism, agnosticism and secular societies.

In addition, Religions/Adyān wishes to highlight and revive the universal horizon of Islam by fostering studies in the relationships between Islam and other religions and civilizations in history, the arts, and religious studies. This is also a way to revitalize intellectual discourse in Islam, within the context of an interactive and cross-fertilizing engagement with other faiths.

The essays published in Religions/Adyān exclusively engage the intellectual responsibility of their authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the DICID. They are published as part of an ongoing dialogue on religions, and should not be construed as the expression of the positions of any sponsoring organization.



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EDITORIAL

It is widely recognized in religious worlds that nothing can be deemed as spiritually necessary as prayer in all its forms, from the most outward to the innermost, since among all possible actions none engages as direct a communication with the Divine. Furthermore, no aspect of life distinguishes religion more clearly from any other human endeavor or ways of being as prayer, simply because it is, among all human acts, the only one that uncompromisingly presupposes and affirms transcendence, while works of charity, service, learning, and others do not necessarily do so.

In monotheistic traditions, prayer defines the essence of the human condition because man was created to worship God. Christian teachings tell us that mankind was created “to know, love, and serve God,” and how could this be achieved better than through prayer, which is both a gift of oneself to God in service and love, and a knowledge of his Reality through and in this gift? That prayer may be considered as a mode of knowledge may come as a surprise to many of us today who have been conditioned to limit knowledge to matters of the mind, thereby ignoring the deep connection of prayer with knowledge by assimilation and identification. We may also tend to forget that prayer is ultimately service—a point that is often overlooked by a world engrossed with outer actions—because the best way to serve God is to give oneself to Him through prayer, and to discover, as a result of this gift, the specific modes in which we may best become of service to Him and to our fellow humans.

It should therefore be evident that there is no spiritual tradition that does not place a strong emphasis on prayer as a central connection between the human and the Divine. This holds true whether the forms of this connection may derive from revelation and tradition or be the spontaneous expressions of our personal needs, whether they be individual or congregational, silent or celebratory. The essays included in this issue explore the various dimensions and facets of this most central aspect of religions that is prayer.

Patrick Laude
Editor-in-Chief



On Prayer

Based on an interview
with Archbishop
George Khodr
(March 2011)

The purpose of prayer in Christian life is union with God, whereby you are submerged in Him and He in you without dissolution nor confusion, abiding in the truth of His love for you and yours for Him.

Prayer, seen from the perspective of its performer, can be individual or collective. Individual prayer is that which a person performs alone, often at home, and in which one says a familiar or an ad hoc orison in response to certain circumstances. Group prayers, in contrast, are performed with the "Holy community" convening to fulfill rituals of known content and order (the morning prayers; the sunset prayers; and the Holy Mass).

However, you are always with the community, the Holy Community, even when you pray alone.

Prayer, whether it be individual or collective, can come under three main rubrics: supplication, thanksgiving and glorification [of God]. In prayers of

supplication, one asks God for whatever one wishes, but chiefly salvation for oneself, in accordance with Jesus' saying: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mat, 6:33). If God responds favorably to one's appeal, then one offers thanks, which can be in one's own words or in the form familiar phrases from group prayers. As for the third category of prayer, it is the prayer of extolling and glorification since you ascend to a vision of His image and you no longer are interested in asking for anything as you already have expressed your thanks. You are face to face with [the glory of] God, having passed through the stages of supplication and thanksgiving.

The perfection of each of these prayers is attained by holding fast to, intending and believing every word you utter in the course of the prayer, and by trusting that as you pray, God will get closer to you and descend to you

in order to raise you to Him. The completeness and perfection of prayer lies ultimately in the (intimate) attachment of your heart to God.

Prayer and the Holy Sacraments

All the Church sacraments (for instance, baptism, thanksgiving, repentance, and marriage) are, at heart, words. During baptism a priest says: God's servant so and so is baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These words are an essential part of the [mystery of the] sacrament, and are drawn from the New Testament upon which the sacraments are based.

But it is not just the words. Indeed, there is a foundation in the Gospel for the whole baptism ritual – the movement of the priest's hands during baptism, the words that accompany such movement, and the nature of the water used. The same applies to the reception of communion, which starts with words, but then follows a certain order and ritual that involves bread and wine, as well as the actual reception of them by hand or by hand and mouth.

So how does one learn to pray? You learn how to pray by reading the Scripture, the sayings of the Church fathers, and from the prayers they have offered us to use during the various times of day and night. And we add to this our own phrases and words.

From the Scripture, for instance, we get the Lord's Prayer, and the centurion's Prayer ("Lord, have mercy on me. I am a sinner"). And from St. Gregory of Nyssa we have received the main Christmas prayer ("Your birth, oh Christ our Lord, has emitted the light of knowledge to the world").

To return to Louis Massignon's remark that Arabic is the [quintessential]

language of prayer here on earth and in the Kingdom of Heaven; this would presuppose that the people of the Kingdom would have to know Arabic.

Beyond that, and ultimately, with God, no language is used.

With regards to the language of prayer, needless to say there are no constraints as to what language one speaks when praying. Some have suggested that Arabic should be the language of prayer since, they say, it is also the language of Heaven. That is not correct, for up there in Heaven no language is used; communication is conducted differently.

Another issue connected to language concerns the version to be used: formal or colloquial? The crucial parameter should be to choose a language that all believers in the community can understand – one language for one community. For example, all Christian Arabs understand the simple formal Arabic. If you start introducing the cacophony of local dialects, which vary widely across the Arab world, it would be impossible to meet the crucial criterion of one language for one community of believers. Arabic unifies Christian Arabs. On the other hand, some smaller nations or communities remain adamant about maintaining their old languages. That raises another question: how enthusiastic are the new generations about such old languages?

The question of language acquires fresh importance when we are reminded of "Pray without ceasing" (Thessalonians 1, 5:17). To St. Paul this means praying on all occasions. And this is further emphasized in the immediately subsequent verse: "In everything give thanks".

In Islam too, the five daily prayers essentially denote the state of being in unceasing prayer. In the call for the dawn break prayer you hear "Prayer is better than sleep," which in this context means prayer is better than, and should take precedence over, everything else. This emphasis on perpetual prayer is expressed by this saying: "Prayer is the sacrifice of every pious one while the Hadj is the Jihad of every weak one. For everything there is zakat (charity) and the zakat of the body is fasting." Amongst the unconvincing phenomena associated with prayer is the endless repetition of the name of God whereby the name of God is repeated until the meaning of the expression is effaced. And if one of those participating in this ritual faints, they claim that he partook of [divine] communication and direct experience of the divine.

In some cases, prayer has a social function. And while prayer can be performed individually or collectively, its benefits may transcend both the individual and the community. For instance, the community can pray for rain or for protection from an epidemic or a war. The purpose of such prayers is not to benefit or protect Christians only, but rather all members of society, Christians and non-Christians alike. In such instances prayer serves a solidarity-building role.

It is true that, according to Church rules, people of different faiths cannot pray together from one scripture. Still, it has become common and acceptable of late for believers from different traditions to stand together behind one imam or priest saying prayers that are acceptable and common to all.

Religion is important, even in different incarnations. That is why mod-

ern humanism, severed from religion remains a deficient doctrine because it lacks the essential element of believing in God and the joy of praying to Him. Indeed, it is the yearning for praying with a community of believers that brought many back to the fold of religion.

Current-day humanity, severed from religion, is in need of faith in God the Creator in order to understand prayer and its natural, human expression. And very often the feeble of faith are guided to God after having sensed the glory of well-organized faith in this or that denomination. There are several prayers in Islam and Christianity which resemble each other. The reciting of verses of the Quran or the Gospels is accepted and appreciated by many a member of each of the two faiths. The Surat al Maryam for instance is often read at Muslim funeral gatherings before Christian visitors paying their respect, and the Christians are moved in awe and piety upon hearing this beautiful verse honoring Mary.

Beyond all the differences among sects and religions, there lies, at depth, a shared prayer, whatever the particular expressions or words uttered may be. This holds especially true for the monotheistic faiths because the vision of the one God paves a road of the one Divinity in the hearts.

The highest form of prayer is that in which the heart speaks without words. It is in no need of words since God has taken full possession. The believer reaches that moment once he knows he is a sinner, this is the stage of the Divine.

Translated by Hussam Khaleel



All thinking is a form of prayer, and there is one and only one prayer: For right understanding of reality and for relating to it with courage and dignity.

Awadh Kishore Saran

The Metaphoric Ascent Of Prayer Prayer as Ritual and Intimacy with God

by John Herlihy

The Religion of Islam has formalized the human communication with God through a prayer ritual captured within a formalized ceremony of devotion and worship that emanates from the Muslim soul. In commemoration of the Prophet Mohamed, peace be upon him, who learned the formalized ritual of prayer from the archangel Gabriel, the angelic

messenger *Jibra'il* of the Quranic text, all Muslims learn the formalities of the prayer ritual when they come of age, although many young children from two onwards feel at ease amid the rows of worshippers in the mosque and often mimic the movements of their elders in a spontaneous outpouring of their innocent souls. Indeed, the Islamic cer-

emony of prayer represents a spontaneous outpouring of the Muslim soul that reflects through prayer an instinctive faith in a Supreme Being, Allah, whose very name calls upon the Divinity and awakens the *sakinah* or Holy Presence of God within the human heart.

Devout Muslims take the prayer ritual very seriously because it is a form of worship that strikes at the heart of the Muslim psyche and gives shape and substance to the Muslim mentality. If the Quran represents a major descent of divine knowledge, then prayer is the "ascent" of the heart-inspired expression of one's deepest and most secret intimacies through a ritualized form of worship and praise that represents the most human expression of a person's understanding of truth and reality. In an era that values the seen over the unseen, that excludes the presence of the Mystery that permeates all of nature and seeks to explain the origin of the universe from within the natural order itself rather than from the supra-natural order that is the origin and source of its laws and harmonies, an era that understands the human entity to be the result of an evolutionary process that began as some spontaneous effusion of dead matter with that mysterious spark we know as "life" resulting from the fortuitous interplay of chemistry and lightning whose modern counterpart lies in the birth of Frankenstein, and that through a secular, pseudo humanistic worldview offers possibility and promise to the notion of a human progress through sidereal and historical time, the notion of a formalized and sacred ritual that addresses the Hidden, the Unseen

and the Mysterious in life as we know it requires some explanation.

To the Muslim soul, however, prayer is the natural response, or ascent if you will, to the revelatory "sword of divine knowledge" that has come down to humanity, not as a cosmic flash of lightning to shatter the serenity of the ur-darkness with the genesis of an unexplained life form, but as the wellspring and source of the essential knowledge and as the vertical wand of Heaven, intersecting the horizontal plane of earthly time with the conscious awareness of the eternal moment, this being none other than the white light of Absolute Truth. The predominant consciousness of our existence in time pulls us away from the timeless and the eternal; but the higher faculties of intellect and intelligence, the higher emotions and sentiments, the intelligence of the heart and the human soul that provides the ground of our spiritual identity do not belong to this world or to time as we know and experience it. There is nothing that our hands can hold onto that is worth having. They cannot hold a moonbeam or seize a rainbow. The beauty of an eagle in flight eludes our grasp as well as our common sense. It is only who we are in our essence, what we believe in, and the manner in which we communicate with a higher order of existence through prayer that lifts us out of the deep well of turpitude within ourselves and sets us back on the straight path, an image often invoked in Islam.

To pray is in effect to step neither backward nor forward but out of time completely for a few moments to re-

member our primordial origins, to infuse the “breath” of the Divine Spirit into the human soul already awash in a sea of multiplicity and afloat amid the turgid currents of a dark Kali Yuga era, and finally to recreate the optimum conditions of body, mind and heart for the ascent, not only of prayer and worship of the individual, but the awakening and raising of the human consciousness to the point that it “sees God everywhere”, not with the human eye of course, but with the inner eye of consciousness that sparkles with the remembrance of God, its own light reflecting off the light of God.

In order to bring about a better understanding of life's mystery, Islam makes possible a private and possibly intimate relationship with God. The encounter between the human and the Divine is direct and immediate; there are no go-betweens such as clergy and seers in Islam as you find in other religions. The earth is God's mosque and conscious awareness fused with an instinctive faith, together with good works supported by right intentions become the warp and weft of a person's inner being just as the thread on a loom become the prayer carpet of one's dreams ready to be spread wherever one walks. While there are always parents and relatives as mentors and guides, leaders in the community who maintain the integrity of the social fabric, imams in the mosque to lead the faithful in prayer, and sheikhs and walis who set the standard of holiness and sanctity that is possible within the framework of Islamic spirituality, in the end every Muslim stands alone

with his Creator. When they stand on their prayer carpet, they bring this awareness with them. This gives a sacerdotal quality to the Islamic character that makes individual Muslims virtual celebrants before God enjoined to perform their own rituals of praise and worship. When the Muslims stand on their prayer carpet, nothing comes between them and their Lord. The sacred communication is formal, direct and surprisingly real. They are in the presence of God and the presence of God is within them. For those few moments of focused remembrance of all that is sacred and true within the framework of existence, the mystery that governs the human worldview and colors it with insecurity and doubt fades away like morning mist, making the prayer ritual a bridge between knowledge and faith in God's enduring Reality.

The prayer ritual is the second earthly duty and the very heart stone of all spirituality in the Islamic cosmos. Five times a day, the Muslims interrupt the flow of their daily routine with the formal Islamic prayer ritual. After making their clear intention, they perform the ritual ablution, which is an inner as well as an outer purification, then throw down their prayer carpet or walk to the mosque, in order to take their stand for a few minutes on the symbolic terrain of sacred ground, at the disposition of the Divine. As a matter of principle through the prayer, the Muslims turn their mind, heart and soul inward in order to communicate on an intimate level with God. The value of the ritualized ceremony lies in the fact not only of its faithful remembrance of God, but in a

continuity that maintains through the phases of the day a constant remembrance of God and a heightened sense of spirituality within mind and heart. The spiritual benefits of the prayer last throughout the entire day and not just at the prayer times. Prayer is not only a communication with the Divine, but a state of mind that awakens a spiritual consciousness fully responsive to the demands of life.

The hidden dimensions of spiritual experience encourage the pursuit of traditional spirituality to deeper levels, and this is no more effectively evidenced in the Quran than through the meaning of the prayer. The Muslim is enjoined to perform the prayer ritual, “establish regular prayers” (17: 78) at five established times during the day. Beyond the formal and ceremonial prayer, however, lies the inner prayer of the heart. “And celebrate the Name of thy Lord in the morning and in the evening” (76: 25). The name of course is none other than the name Allah as the Name of names, but also includes the other 99 names and qualities of the Divinity mentioned in the Quran that characterize the divine essence. The Quran goes on to exemplify a more intense kind of prayer in the form of nocturnal vigils: “And part of the night prostrate thyself to Him, and glorify Him throughout the long night” (76: 26). The pursuit of the way encourages this kind of spiritual dedication and anticipates a higher spiritual station. “Soon will thy Lord raise thee to a station of praise and glory” (17: 79).

For devout Muslims, vigilance and watchfulness of soul are the keys to

the way of return to God, qualities distinguished by their intimation of vision and readiness. The pursuit of the way becomes a journey through all phases of personal and spiritual identity toward a consciousness of self that finds its natural and only true complement in unity in the absolute Consciousness of God. The believer offers his/her limited individual soul in exchange for the embrace of the Supreme Self. If the beginning of this process is human aspiration to reach beyond individual limits, the destination and end is always God. The life experience of the human individual is the very heart of the way, the human offering in expectation of the divine promise of salvation in the Divine Beatitude.

* * *

Prayer is not verbal. It is from the heart.
To merge into the Heart is prayer.
(Sri Ramana Maharshi)

If prayer is a compass—indeed in the Islamic tradition, the ceremony of prayer focuses on pure space and true direction toward the Kaaba in Makkah before soaring vertically heavenward toward the mysterious empyrean of the Spirit—then its four coordinators of north-south-east-west are good intention, thought, word and action. This is especially true for the prayers that conform to a specified liturgy as in the Religion of Islam. A person resolves to pray through a good intention, thinks about and communicates prayerful thoughts, using the sacramental and ritual words—in Islam the words of rev-

elation—and performs prayer through a formal ceremony.

Canonical prayer that conforms to a specific liturgy permits the practitioner to participate existentially in the life of the spirit through a revealed and formalized prayer or prayer ritual that connects the real world here below with the Reality from above. The *Pater Noster* ("Our Father"), commonly known as the Lord's Prayer in Christianity, and the ceremony of prayer or prayer ritual in the Islamic tradition are two forms of canonical prayer that are still viable and living traditions available to modern man, although the Islamic ritual is a virtual ceremony whose forms and actions—such as the bowing and prostrations—contain their own significance and blessing.

Each of these two traditions represents a different aspect of canonical prayer. The *Pater Noster* permits the cognitive processing and visualization of sacred symbols through a formalized prayer whose very form has an interior dimension as well as an aspect of universality that has the capacity to touch the souls of all men unconditionally, Christians and Muslims alike. The Islamic prayer ritual, which features the seven opening verses of the Quran contained within its first chapter (*al-Fatihah*), formalizes symbolic imagery, evocative sounds, auditory symbols, symbolic gestures and movements together with sacred and revealed speech within a symbolic ritual that sets in motion the quintessential alchemy of the soul within¹ the Islamic setting. Both of these forms of canonical prayer lead from the world of outwardness and

separation to a world of inwardness and union. They permit the practitioner to place him or herself within the center of the self, namely the heart, and establish a rhythm that can affect all forms of the life experience with its implicit goodness and spirituality.

Most notably, the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria* are well loved canonical prayers used by Christians in association with a spiritual practice called the recitation of the rosary, which in itself has a ritualistic pattern and a formulaic method that establishes an internal rhythm that makes an enduring impact on the soul of the practitioner. As a small child, I remember being dragged from behind trees and the top of flower trellises in the summer evening twilight to gather together with the rest of my siblings to recite with our parents the rosary that was broadcast every night at 7:00 by the then Cardinal Cushing of Boston². It represented a sobering and somber interlude from the frenzy of our childhood play; yet it established a pattern of discipline and remembrance that I have preserved to this day and that serves me well in the pursuit of my Islamic spiritual disciplines. Similarly, the Islamic prayer ritual, with its emphasis on a practice of five appointed prayer times, literally seals a person's daily existence with the hot wax of a sacred routine, identifies and quantifies the day's external rhythms, and provides a refuge from the vicissitudes of life and its inevitable evil possibilities. Such prayer rituals performed by Christians and Muslims the world over leave their imprint not only on the soul, but on society generally.

*Pater Noster
qui es in coeli
sanctificetur nomen tuum
Adveniat regnum tuum
fiat voluntas tua
sicut in coelo et in terra*

Our Father
who art in heaven
hallowed be Thy name
thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven

*Panem nostrum cotidianum
da nobis hodie*

Give us this day
our daily bread

*et dimitte nobis debita nostra
sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostri*

and forgive us our trespasses
we forgive those who trespass
as against us

*et ne nos inducas in tentationem
sed libera nos a malo
Amen*

and lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil
Amen

Lord:

Our Father

Paradise:

Who are in Heaven

Holy Name:

Hallowed be Thy Name

The Divine Coming:

Thy Kingdom come

The Divine Will:

Thy will be done

Heaven and Earth:

On earth as it is in Heaven.

* * * *

Sustenance:

Give us this day our daily bread

Forgiveness:

And forgive us our trespasses

Forgiving:

*As we forgive those who trespass
against us*

Evil:

And lead us not into temptation

Deliverance:

But deliver us from evil.

Resolution:

Amen.

It is worth highlighting the symbolic imagery of both of these prayers since they play such a significant part in awakening the mind, not only to the key concepts of Christianity and Islam, but also because both traditions create a feeling and an ambience that awakens the imagination with their power for creating sacred meaning. The Lord's Prayer, replete with its sacred, symbolic imagery, reads as follows:

Of the twelve elements identified here, the first six refer directly to the divine perspective in the identification of God in His supreme parentage of humanity, His heavenly abode, His sacred name, the divine coming and the divine will, with reference to the polarities of earth and heaven as remembrance of existential reality. The second six elements of the prayer refer more specifically to humanity, with reference to their earthly and human condition,

including their sustenance, forgiveness and ultimate deliverance.

"Our Father" identifies the human mentality with the patriarchal persona of the Divine Being, resorting to familiar familial terminology in coming to terms with the concept of a Supreme Being as the progenitor of the human soul. Within the symbolic imagery of this perspective, the sacred psychology is such that God is referred to as father in keeping with the Biblical figure of the ancient and stern patriarch of which the prophets were the human counterparts. "Who art in Heaven" locates the other-dimensional and other-worldly kingdom that promises the human entity transcendence of the limitations of his earthly condition, although Christians are reminded elsewhere in the New Testament that "the Kingdom of God is within you." "Hallowed be Thy Name" recalls the sacredness of the absolute Name of God, and if it be hal-



lowed, then it becomes the medium of man's worship and praise, thus the invocation of the holy Name becomes the basis and focal point for the prayer.

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." Contingent upon the human impulse to pray is the response of the Divine Being, manifested as the coming of the kingdom and the perfection of His will. Once again, we have been told that the kingdom is within and therefore directly associated with the perfection of the human will in association and in perfect harmony with the Divine will through surrender. "On earth as it is in Heaven" links once again the created earth with the other-worldly paradise, offering possibilities and promises that the Lord's Prayer merely hints at through symbolic language without further elaboration. It is enough for the faithful to remind themselves of the immanent blessing of the "Father" and the divine recompense for the human response of devotion and worship.

"Give us this day our daily bread" reminds the faithful of their dependence on God for their daily sustenance. Bread is of course symbolic of life itself; in Arabic the word for bread is *aish*, which is the colloquial word for the verb "to live", emphasizing through the spoken language that bread and life are one. Obviously, humans owe their ultimate sustenance to the Divine Being, who provides the human sustenance necessary for survival, including the cycles of seasons, agriculture and weather, universal cycles that highlight the fundamental reliance of God with regard to His provision for mankind.

"And forgive us our trespasses." We need to ask forgiveness for our

transgressions as a matter of spiritual routine. Because we are human, we suffer the fault of our own limitations and weaknesses. Our deliberate sins and evils take us outside the norm and alienate us from the beatitude of the divine presence. We ask forgiveness because of who we are and what we have done.

"As we forgive those who trespass against us." We cannot ask of God that which we are not prepared to ask of ourselves. If we ask for divine forgiveness, we must be prepared to express our own humanity in light of the divine example and forgive those who trespass against us. Otherwise, on what basis can we rightfully expect that we ourselves should be forgiven?

"And lead us not into temptation" because temptation is the prelude and forerunner of all that leads us away from the Divine Beatitude. We must rely on the Divine Being to keep us out of harm's way, and that must include the way of temptation that can only lead to further separation from the Divine Being.

"But deliver us from evil." After the divine forgiveness, after the promise to forgive those who trespass against us, and after the heart-felt entreaty to keep us far from temptation, the Lord's Prayer concludes with the aspiration to avoid the evil alternative and keep away from the inclinations that will lead us into further evil. Deliverance from evil means none other than deliverance from Satan, the great corrupter, seducer and whisperer into the ears of humankind. Deliverance from evil as a heart-felt sentiment to conclude the prayer is actually a deliverance from

Satan as the enemy of God and as the principle of evil itself.

Finally, “amen” is the sound word that concludes the prayer and seals the communication. Its sonorous cadence and prolonged vowelization approximates in curious fashion the utterance of a sigh and actually summarizes with a symbolic sound a concept that is equally represented in a number of languages including Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Old/Middle English and finally modern English. “Amen” actually means “so be it” with the implication “so be it as truth and certainty” and contains within its utterance a definitive and conclusive air. Therefore, it resolves in a word the heart-felt entreaties of the prayer and brings the sacred communication to its logical conclusion. “Amen” closes once again the envelope to eternity that had been opened by the commencement of the formal prayer.

I include this extensive mapping of the Lord’s Prayer and refer to other Christian prayers such as the familiar Hail Mary—its English, its Latin, and its significance—because the sacred Latinate words “Pater Noster qui es in chelis” and “Ave Maria gratia plena” found a place in my heart many years ago when I was a young child and have remained there as an enduring remembrance of a unique experience of true spirituality that is fondly remembered as being innocent and pure. Over the years, these two prayers have become a kind of spiritual benchmark of native and instinctive spirituality that I hold up to myself even now because its truth shines forth as a rarefied and unique experience of an artless childhood spirituality whose spiritual force continues

to perpetuate the fragrance of childhood innocence within the adult mind.

As a modest young child and much to my dismay, the nuns who saw to my education singled me out from the pack because they discovered I had a sweet boy soprano voice. It was not something that I was proud of and I had a natural aversion to singing in the presence of others; even though when I was alone, I sang to my heart’s content, happy to have a voice that could express the inexpressible melodies in my heart. I loved the sober elegance of the sacred church songs that accompany the liturgy, the Christmas songs, and the well known Ave Maria of Schubert and Gounod that every tenor, particularly Irish ones, attempts to render with majesty and verve. Something indescribably holy and otherworldly in these sacred melodies appealed to my simple, innocent mind and lifted me out of the routine of my everyday world.

The small suburban town where I grew up outside of Boston had a church named St. Agnes. I remember the massive stone stairs that led up into the spacious knave of the church. On Sunday morning, however, I always entered through the sacristy disguised as a virtual angel bedecked in my purple gown and white surplice. I was one of a hundred children in the boy’s choir that had a reputation in the area; people came from miles around on a Sunday morning to hear the sacred songs of the boy’s choir that accompanied the popular 10:30 High Mass. Much to my chagrin, however, I was singled out from this group for two reasons, firstly because I was the shortest of the entire lot and therefore took up the front of

the line as we filed into the nave of the church and took our places in the passageway behind the main altar. Secondly, I had been selected as the premier soloist for the choir, the boy selected to sing the prime solo parts during the Mass. I sang such sacred songs as the Schubert's well known Ave Maria (Hail Mary full of grace) and the sober and majestic Panis Angelicus (The bread of heaven). Needless to say, the prospect of stepping out from the shadows of the high altar and the restless group of boys, who had the luxury of singing in anonymity, struck my tender young heart with a unique combination of terror and sublimity. However, in spite of my natural aversion to displaying my singing talent in public, and in spite of the implicit fear my pounding heart betrayed, I stepped out every Sunday morning during the course of the liturgy and transcending the impulses of my childhood fears I sang, as if in a dream, a variety of sacred songs during the celebration of Mass. This was prayer at its most enchanting and sublime moment, giving voice to the pious entreaties and intimate expressions of love that reach through the natural rhythms of song to the heavens.

Amid the ethereal shadows of the altar, dressed in the traditional vestments of the boy's choir, the air bereft with the aromatic flavours of burning candles and heavily scented church incense that wafted their arabesques of cloud through the latticework and arches, I remember the experience as the materialization of my soul through the sound of my innocent voice. I was no longer myself as a body, a person or even a thinking animal; I had some-

how transcended the normal course of events to meet the demands of the moment, the voice becoming and being a virtual presence with its own truth and its own form of praise, unburdened by any physical form and soaring into places on high that are not normally accessible to people on earth. Birdlike and from the cavern of my small fluttering chest there emerged a melody that I didn't recognize as my own; but rather as some God-given gift which I had not earned, but was mine to employ and enjoy. Out of some deep well of my being, I poured forth all the raw emotion, the confused desire for God, and the implicit beauty captured within the melodic music of the composer, the sound of the voice riding the melody as if it were riding a sleek tiger, wild, thrilling and uplifting beyond belief. And yet the singer of a song feels a vulnerability that emerges from the cave of the heart as an evocative outward display of some inner spirit. The song and the voice emerged from my depths as a soul sound from Heaven rather than from the breath and vocal cords of a terrorized child. This was prayer at its sweetest and most profound moment, emerging through the pure voice of innocence and passing through the ears and hearts of the faithful as it made its way through the rafters and trellises of the church, through the open church door and out into the open sky, where all song melodies unite with the celestial rhythms of the spheres and ultimately mingle with the voices of the angels to be listened to by the cohorts that roam the empyrean of Heaven.

As I commit these thoughts and images to paper as a permanent memory, I

listen to the echo of a child’s voice from the distant past and reminisce on the experience of beatitude that in these restless and heavy times is difficult to imagine and almost impossible to recreate, except as the lost fragrance of another time and place when a young child’s prayerful song was no doubt listened to and heard.

* * *

Muslims recite the opening seven verses of the Quran,³ the *Surat Al-Fatihah*, as the key component of the Islamic prayer ritual. The seven verses are recited a minimum of seventeen times a day throughout the course of the five prayers, and this does not include supererogatory prayers related to the *Sunnah* or the practice of the Prophet—additional prayers that accompany the five ceremonial prayers at the “appointed time”—which would include even more repetitions of these seven “opening” verses. In other words, these verses are of paramount importance to every Muslim because they highlight both the doctrine and the practice of the religion, the doctrine insofar as they represent the quintessence of the entire Quran and the practice because they are repeated between twenty

and thirty times a day by the practising faithful depending on their vigilance in following the Sunnah or practice of the Prophet. Needless to say, these seven verses have powerful associations with the spiritual dimension, and contain a symbolic value in terms of both knowledge and sound vibration that have the power on physical, psychic and spiritual levels to transform the mind and mentality of the practitioner with its clarity and light and to soften the heart with deep emotive sentiments.

Like the Lord’s Prayer, it is worth highlighting the seven verses used canonically in the Islamic prayer ritual because they not only represent the quintessential substance of the Quran, but also because they instil within the Muslim soul the elements of the essential knowledge of God. The sacred words contain a symbolic imagery that encapsulates within a few phrases all that they need to remember in order to maintain the foundation of piety and equilibrium they need to re-establish themselves within their own center, before meeting the center of the earth at the Kaaba in Makkah, as a prelude and personal experience of that primordial Center that exists at the heart of the universe. The verses, with their summative symbolic imagery, are as follows:

Praise:	Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds
Names:	The Infinitely Good, the Ever Merciful
Judgement:	King of the Day of Judgement
Worship:	In Thee we worship and in Thee we seek refuge
Guidance:	Guide us on the straight path
Beatitude:	The path of those on whom is Thy Grace
Damnation:	Not of those on whom is Thy Wrath, nor of those who are lost.

“Praise be to God” opens the Islamic prayer with formal praise of God as the most fitting spiritual attitude that, not only men and women but, every living creature can offer the Divinity. Praise is the most elementary as well as necessary human response to the spiritual truth of the Divinity, especially for human beings, who must give voice to their praise through deliberate intention and prayer, unlike the other animals who praise the Divine Being by simply *being* what they are instinctively.

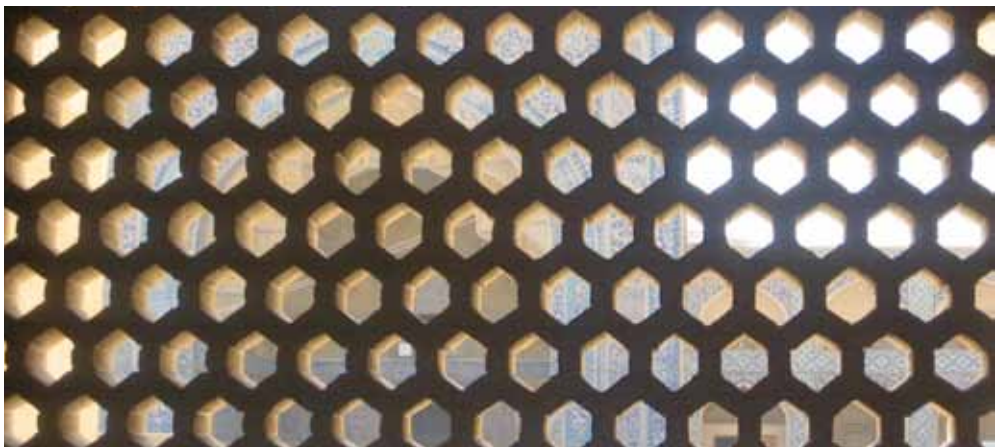
“Lord of the worlds” highlights the fact that the universe is made up of multiple worlds both outer and inner, microcosmic and macrocosmic, but there is only one Divinity who is the Lord of the metacosmic universe that is inclusive of all the worlds.

“The Infinitely Good, the Ever Merciful” are alternative names of God, and express variations of His divine qualities and attributes of which the human qualities are but transparent reflections. The Muslim remembers these particular names of Allah because of their association with the *Rahmah*, or Mercy which the human being is in des-

perate need of. God gives us our daily bread as the Lord's Prayer has foretold and this is only one of the infinite mercies that emanate from the Divinity, our very existence being the ultimate mercy.

“King of the Day of Judgment” is one of the names of God directly identified in the *al-Fatihah*, perhaps to indicate that God is not only Lord of all the worlds, but also master of the end of finite time. We by contrast are slaves of the King, just as the relative must defer to the absolute and will ultimately disappear in the Face of the Absolute.

“It is Thee we worship and it is in Thee we seek refuge” gives shape and definition to all human duties and aspirations. Worship counterbalances the praise initiated in the opening verse. Praise is the initial, instinctive impulse as a prelude to the systematic worship of the Divine Being because “no one compares with Him.” Worship recognizes God for what He is and provides us the opportunity to escape from the confines of our own limited mentality for the sake of the Beloved who becomes the object of all worship. Ref-



uge then complements the concept of the Lord of all the worlds and is the natural response of the human lover for the Divine Beloved. Refuge is possible because of the sacred trust between the human and the Divine. God is infinitely Good and Merciful and therefore the only refuge lies in returning to that goodness and mercy.

"Guide us on the straight path" represents the systematic and saving entreaty of human beings who know their place in the hierarchy of being and know the condition of their inner being, namely as entities in desperate need of guidance along a path that is straight and direct and that leads to a clear destination. The straight path is ultimately the path of hope and the path of ascent represented by the symbolic vertical dimension that intersects the horizontal plane of existence with its projection of universal truth, thus the reference in the following verse to the path of grace.

"The path of those on whom is Thy grace" is available as part of the Divine Mercy and the overflowing beatitude that has the power to attract and draw us upwards. Humans need to open themselves up to that grace and respond with their existential affirmation of the Truth through intelligence and free will. Otherwise, they will become disposed to the path of fear and loathing.

"Not of those on whom is Thy wrath and those who are lost:" Those people who do not pursue the path of grace and blessing are susceptible to the Divine Anger and the separation that is implicit in that wrath. By opposing the Divine Unity, they become separated

into a realm of endless multiplicity and ultimately suffer damnation by virtue of the fact that they have free willingly separated themselves from the Divinity.

Needless to say, every Muslim gladly closes the verses of the *al-Fatihah* with the firm conviction to take the path of those who receive the Divine Favor and avoid at all cost the path of those who receive the Divine Wrath, while remembering the well known inscription that is said to be written at the base of the throne (*al-arsh*) of Allah: "My Mercy precedes My Wrath." The prayer concludes as in the Christian prayer with the sonorous word *Ameen*, intoned by all the faithful in congregational prayer as a means of setting the seal on their most human prayer to the Divine Being they wish to communicate with and emulate.

The content of the Lord's Prayer and the *al-Fatihah* have interesting similarities and differences that highlight the unique character of each unique, spiritual tradition. Both prayers identify the Divinity and give Him various Names, the one paternal, the other regal and qualitative. The Lord's Prayer makes reference to the coming of the (second) Kingdom which indirectly implies a kind of day of judgement which is mentioned outright in the *al-Fatihah*. The Christian prayer mentions sustenance in the form of "daily bread" while the Islamic prayer focuses on worship and the trust between the human and the Divine. Finally, the Lord's Prayer focuses on forgiveness and deliverance from evil while the Islamic prayer highlights the imagery of the path (*tariq*), a path most notably leading in two directions, the one vertical and transcending,

bound for the beatitude and blessings of the Paradise, the other horizontal and leading downward, bound for the netherland of unspeakable separation and loss characteristic of damnation. Both prayers find resolution and seal in the commemorative word "Amen", the contemporary "so be it" that recalls the proverbial and more hopeful "be it so" of traditional lore. "Amen" closes both prayers as a statement of certainty and as a confirmation of the Truth.

* * *

There remains one final note to sound in this exposition of the Islamic prayer as ritual remembrance in search of intimacy with our one true Friend, and that is none other than the sonorous and captivating call to prayer that emanates five times a day from the minarets of mosques clear across the Islamic crescent from the Maghreb (the place where the sun sets) in the West to the Khyber Pass (a natural passageway linking Afghanistan with Pakistan) in the East, a swath of land that exhibits a traditional Islamicity that is culturally distinctive and spiritually unique. Indeed the call to prayer is both a collective and individual summons, collective in that it makes its way through the streets and by-ways of a city or town, steals through open windows, down passageways, across unsuspecting rooftops, through ears, into minds and finally down into the hearts and souls of humanity to resurrect a memory and a remembrance of the "one thing needful" amid the pressure and turmoil of people's daily lives and its pressing demands.

The role of the Islamic *adhan* is a rarefied and honoured duty of a selected member of the faithful. When Muslims hear the cry of the *adhan*, they remember the clear and courageous call of the black African slave Bilal⁴, famous as a faithful believer who suffered undue torture at the hands of the enemies of Islam and whose clear voice reflected and emulated the intensity of his faith. The call that signals the appointed prayer time continues to sound down through the ages as a cry in the wilderness of modernity and a call of invitation. Its regular intonation throughout the day and its interaction with the structure and pace of the life weaves a texture of spirituality into the fabric of our routine lives, highlighting the primordial and the preternatural aura that overlays all of existence and that lies within the soul as a primal summons to remembrance.

When I travelled to the Islamic world for the first time to take up a posting as a lecturer in English at Kuwait University in the Arabian Gulf, one of the first things that I noticed as distinctively Islamic was the ubiquitous call of the *adhan* five times a day, a thoroughly unexpected artefact of traditional spirituality that transported me back in time to earlier fantasies of flying carpets and Turkish bashas sitting on oriental prayer carpets awaiting the call to prayer. Bilal's original call has broken over time into countless pieces to become the call of a multitude of sacred voices galvanizing cities and towns across the Islamic crescent toward the remembrance of God, voices of the *adhan* that are all struggling for supremacy in the mind of the faithful amid the dissonant ca-

cophony of sound that makes up today's city life. The voices of the *adhan* all come together in a sonorous echo of sound that beckons the heart to withdraw for a few minutes of the day and return through the implicit blessing of the prayer ritual to that abode we are promised in revelation.

The Islamic prayer ritual is a formal, revealed ceremony of prayer that is existential, intimate and revelatory. As an existential phenomenon, it happens in the here and now five times in the everyday routine. The Muslims live with this spiritual practice every day of their lives and in return this discipline of remembrance becomes a part of them. As a phenomenon of intimacy, it con-

tains all the thoughts and desires that exist within the human mind as a fundamental and instinctive urge of faith to communicate with their Creator and Lord. As a revelatory phenomenon, it becomes a mirror reflection of the total essence of the human soul, bringing together the primordial mystique that accompanies the descent of the divine revelation with the human spirit that ascends on high with the whispers of the prayer ritual, arriving back through this wheel of descent and return to that source of knowledge and blessing that has created life in the first place and that empowers all of the created universe to exist as a mirror of light in reflection of the one true Reality.

NOTES

1. "Mental activity is capable not only of thought but also of imagination, thus of visualizing a symbolic form; in like manner, the spirit is sensitive not only to concepts but also to evocative sounds, to auditory symbols; and in like manner again, the body is capable not only of movements that are necessary or useful, but also of symbolic gestures."... "The visual image *a priori* addresses the mind, thus it pertains to the region of the forehead; sound is in connection with our center, the heart; and symbolic movement, quite evidently, concerns the body." F. Schuon, *To Have a Center* (Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom Books, 1990) p. 144.

2. Cardinal Cushing was a crusty old priest with a gravelly voice. He was a source of terror among the children of the diocese of Boston because of how he looked and the manner in which he conducted the sacramental confirmations of the children of the diocese. At one point in the ceremony of confirmation, the cardinal struck the child on the cheek as a symbolic gesture of toughening the wayward children for the long road in life ahead. We all lived in terror of this beloved and saintly cardinal on our day of confirmation because the symbolism contained a reality that was hard to ignore. Cardinal Cushing was a friend of the Kennedy family and officiated at the inauguration of John F. Kennedy in 1960.

3. The opening seven verses of the Quran are described by the Quran itself as seven of the oft-repeated verses (*sab'an min al-mathani*) in the following Quranic verse: "We have given thee (the Prophet) seven of the oft-repeated (verses), and the mighty Quran" (15: 87). Scholars have often referred to these seven verses as the quintessence of the whole of the Quran.

4. Umayyah, one of the leaders of the Quraish tribe in Makka at that time, would take Bilal out at high noon into an open space and have him pinned down to the ground with a large rock on his chest, inciting him to renounce Mohamed and worship the false gods al-Lat and al-Uzzah. While he endured his suffering, Bilal is reported in the traditional sources to have simply repeated: "One, One".



Morning Prayer as Another Way of Knowing the World¹

by Peter Ochs

Beginning at Night

While this essay's focus is Morning Prayer, how we greet this day depends on what happened, last night, to the day before. To introduce our study, I will therefore ask you to undertake a brief exercise of thinking about the following verse from Jewish Evening Prayer:

Blessed are you YHVH our God, Ruler of the universe, by whose word the evening falls. With wisdom he opens

the gates of heaven, and with understanding he changes the periods of the day and varies the seasons, setting the stars in their courses in the sky according to his will. Creating day and night, rolling away light before darkness and darkness before light, he causes the day to pass and bring on the night, making a division between day and night: YHVH of hosts is his Name. May the ever-living God rule over us forever and ever. Blessed are you YHVH who makes the evenings fall.²

To enter this exercise, consider all the actions you undertake during the day to be either judgments of observation (of the form “(I believe) X is y”) or judgments of action (of the form “(I will) do A to B”). Think of these judgments as divisible into two parts: subjects (such as “I”) and predicates (such as “will do A to B”). Think of these parts as corresponding to two parts of the world: things and their qualities. And think of your judgments as actions that bring predicates into relation with subjects, symbolizing how qualities are brought into relation with the things they qualify. If you do all this, then you are thinking according to what I call “the modern way,” the way of “propositional judgments.”

Now, imagine that this propositional thinking is the thinking we do only in the daylight, when we think we see things clearly. Imagine that, according to the evening blessing I cited, the universe of nightfall is distinct from the universe of daylight. Imagine nightfall as a place in time that dissolves our capacity to link subjects and predicates and, thus, our capacities to make good or bad propositional judgments. At night, one could say, judgments go to sleep turning predicates into dreams, and subjects go to rest in the invisibility of the night. In the realm of the night we no longer think actively and clearly; God alone is actor and judge: in the words of Nighttime Prayer:

Blessed are you, YHVH, Ruler of the universe, who closes my eyes in sleep, my eyelids in slumber. May it be your will, YHVH my God and God of my ancestors, that I lie down in peace and rise up in peace. Let my thoughts not

upset me, nor bad dreams or sinful fancies..... Into His hand I entrust my spirit when I go to sleep – and I shall awaken!

Into Morning Prayer

Blessed are you YHVH our God, Ruler of the universe, who forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates all things. In mercy he gives light to the earth and all who dwell on it. In his goodness, he daily and constantly renews the order of creation. How vast are your works YHVH! As it is said, “Praise the one who makes great lights, for his mercy endures forever” (Ps. 136). ...Blessed are You YHVH who fashions the lights.

Morning Prayer offers a wake up call. It prepares individuals to frame judgments that refashion dreams into qualities of what we desire and refashion the silent things of the night into distinct things that we consciously desire. Daytime judgments are judgments about how to fulfill our desires in the world. Morning Prayer offers a training ground for making these judgments in the right way.

We cannot say how all humans in all places awaken in the morning. But we can guess that modern westerners tend to feel prepared, as soon as they awaken, to judge the world in ways that best fit the institutions that have dominated western civilization since the 17-18th centuries: the nation state, the market and various institutions of science and technology. I believe these institutions socialize individuals to judge the world in “the propositional way,” which is to see the things of this world as resources for fulfilling our de-

sires. To greet the morning this way is to see the world as a set of distinct objects of vision whose qualities identify their potential usefulness to us (for our political, economic, or material needs). Even more significantly, these qualities can be contemplated apart from the things themselves. Perceiving them as images in the mind, one can play with the images: re-fashioning the qualities, re-ordering which quality connects to which thing and, thereby, manipulating one's judgments of the world. One could change one's perceptions of other people, from "being ugly" to "being kind." One could re-vision clouds as pictures of people, poverty as riches, or one could even lose any sense of the difference between the world out there and the world as imagined. This propositional way of judging the world is not bad in itself; it is simply not the only way to judge, and in some cases it is the wrong way. It is always wrong when it is imagined to be the only way to know the world. When this happens – as it often does in the modern world – the propositional way of knowing becomes what we can call "the totalitarian way," "the imperialist or colonialist," or the "reductive way."

One purpose and effect of Morning Prayer is to offer modern worshippers the capacity to frame judgments in a different, non-propositional way. There are times when this way is useful and there are times it is not useful. My thesis is that the non-propositional way of knowing the world is redemptive if and when my world is over-run by propositional ways of knowing.

Morning Blessings as Sources of Redemptive Judgments

How can the modern thinker learn to think in non-propositional ways? In this central section, I examine a sample set of blessings from the opening pages of Jewish Morning Prayer, suggesting how daily habits of praying each one may contribute to a modern Jewish thinker's capacity to make judgments in a non-propositional as well as a propositional way.

1. *modeh ani lefanekha*: "thankful am I"

A meditation for the first moment of the day. Let us imagine the very first moment of the morning, when the eyes open, the body's primal waters begin to circulate, and muscles begin to enact the morning's first desire: to re-awaken as an agent of action. At this moment, the words of Morning Prayer intervene, enjoining the individual to utter this blessing before doing any thing else: "Thankful am I before you, living and ever living leader, for you have returned my soul to me out of your abundant graciousness and faithfulness." "Thankful am I." "I" am there; the first person is not forgotten. But I am secondary to You who is first person before I am: You, the living Ruler or Leader (*melekh*). My first act as a speaker is to declare that, just as this verb (*modeh*) precedes me (*ani*), so does Your agency precede my first actions. I have not abandoned my agency, but I have declared that my agency is the consequence of Another. It is You who act, I who receive, You who have brought me back to life, You who

have opened my eyes, You who have stimulated my muscles, You who have granted me the reason for desire. At the very moment when I would have rushed headlong into the day and forgotten You, *modeh ani*: I remember You: You who are faithful to me before I even remember how to be faithful to You.

We may already see here a guideline for how to make judgments during the day. For yes I can make judgments, I have agency. But I have to wait to find out what will precede, accompany, and follow that agency.

2. *reshit chokhma yirat YHVH*: Fear/Awe of YHVH is the beginning of wisdom.

So, yes, I will make judgments, but they do not originate with me. Judgment is grounded in wisdom, and wisdom begins with my relationship to the creator alone: a source of my utter dependency before that which creates and sustains all this. I know that if "I see this or that," I see because of You and I see what is from you.

3. *barchi nafshi et YHVH*: Bless YHVH O my soul.

Who am I, then, who would judge the world, but who first knows the "I" of "I judge" as the I of "I thank You?" This "I" becomes more tangible as I next don a prayer shawl³ and pray "Bless YHVH O my soul; YHVH my God You are very great. Dressed in strength and majesty, You enwrap Yourself in light as in a garment, unfolding the heavens like a curtain." Through this practice, I address this "I" as *nefesh*, my "animating soul." This is a soul that lives and breathes as a consequence of oth-

ers. And what is *its own* fundamental act? To bless the creator, who is named YHVH and who daily relights the world by wearing the heavenly light as a garment, just as I enwrap myself in a garment of prayer.

4. *hineni mitatef... k'de l'kayem mitsvat bor'i kakatuv b'torah*:

The next action is physical: "I now enwrap myself in a fringed prayer shawl, fulfilling God's commands as disclosed in the Torah." In this way, I name myself an agent in the work that establishes the morning. But I am not an agent of myself. I act as if in imitation of the creator, enacting a scripturally grounded ritual. In this way, the movements of my body follow the movements of my voice, which follows the words of morning prayer.⁴

5. *baruch she amar v'haya olam*: Blessed be the One who spoke and the world came into being.

Baruch she amar is a praise of the God of Genesis 1: "In the beginning of God's creating heaven and earth, the earth being unformed and void and a spirit of God hovering over the face of the deep.... God said "Let there be Light," and there was Light! It is as if Morning Prayer were itself a repetition of the first act of creation: just as this world begins with God's proclaiming "Light!" so too I begin each day by proclaiming my gratitude to the one who restores life; just as each day begins with God's enwrapping himself in the heavenly lights, so too I begin each day by enwrapping myself in the *tallit*.

As one proclaims later in the Morning Prayer, "(God) everyday and con-

tinually renews the order of creation” : each day is truly a renewal of the world’s creation and my creation. God’s speaking is thus an activity of bringing into being. And what of my speaking? While the verb used for “speaking” is *amar*, the Biblical synonym is *dibber*, as in “God spoke to Moses, saying...” (*vayidbar YHVH el moshe l’emor*). The synonym is significant, since the verb “to speak” is the root of the word “thing,” *davar*, referring to any created thing in the world. Just as a “creature,” *b’riah*, is that which God “created,” *barah*, so too is any thing, *davar*, that which God spoke, *dibber*. One might therefore regard any thing in the world as God’s reified speaking: a living dog is God’s having spoken “dog.” If so, what difference does it make to perceive the entire world as a spoken word rather than as the subject of a proposition?

Judging the world without Morning Prayer: If I rush into the day without Morning Prayer, then as a modern person I perceive the leaves on that tree outside my room as something like “those green, oaken leaves hanging over the dogwood by the car” that might soon lead me to consider “but I need to drive to school, what time is it? And I am hungry.” Later, something might possibly draw me outside to look again at the leaves – perhaps remembering that I had planned to prune the tree. In one case, I may think “This leaf may have a fungal growth on it”; in the other case, “I need a ladder to cut down that old branch.”

Judging the world with Morning Prayer: At least for a few moments after Morning Prayer (before resuming

my old habits), I might perceive those leaves not just as things but something like words-still-being-spoken. I might say something like this: the leaves appear to me not just as “leaves” – green, yellow-veined things there in that tree – but as words spoken by God to anyone listening: as if to say, “here I who created the world have taken time to bring you these leaves as palettes of color to paint your imaginations these hues of ochre, garden green, with hints of spider webs.” Or, I might, if the leaves were beautiful, recite a blessing such as “Blessed are You, YHVH, Ruler of the Universe, who has such beauty in His world.” Or I might speak of the laws of trees, “When you in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the axe against them” (Deut. 20:19). Or I might speak about the new ways that these leaves now appear to me: not as things closed off and finished, but as brief glimpses into on-going processes, of fluids flowing up and flowing down, of cell-division.

In what logical forms would all these non-propositional judgments be displayed? This is the concluding question for our study.

Logics Learned in Morning Prayer

Recall our account of how Night Prayer allowed the judgments we made during the day to fall apart: allowing subjects to fold into the vague things of the dark and allowing predicates to fall into our dreams. Now, consider what



held the world together when we slept in the dark. According to Night Prayer, the creator's never-ending activity held the world together, suggesting that it is neither we nor our ideas that hold the world together. When the daylight rouses us to judgment once again, we might therefore act with less arrogance about our "clear daylight vision." While we may see clear and distinct things in the daytime world, we have no reason to presume that it is the creator's way nor a source of great insight into the way of the world as it is spoken. Should you object, "But this is how we humans know the world and how else can we imagine the work of the creator other than by way of analogy to the way we know?" – then we may respond, "Yes, we should reason by analogy. But why assume that the prototypically 'human' is represented by the way individual

judgments link subjects to predicates? There are richer, more helpful and accurate ways of articulating how we know the world, and these may be observed through Morning Prayer." To avoid too much technicality, I will examine only one general type of non-propositional logic inculcated by Morning Prayer: what we may label a "logic of relations."

Here is the simplest way I can think of to illustrate a logic of relations. Begin with a letter, say, R. Let us suppose that R stands for this whole process of which we have an immediate intuition, direct but vague and undifferentiated, as if to say: there it is, this whole blooming reality, confusing but really there just is this way: R. Then, imagine that, little by little, depending on the specific contexts and presuppositions we bring to it, we come to per-

ceive more and more dimensions of R. Consider we perceive each dimension only as one part of a more complex relation. The simplest example might be the way that, when perceiving some complex movement in the distant sky, I sense "blueness" when I "look there." Label the blueness "b," and the context of standing here "s." Let us then use the symbol "sRb" to express the way that, when I stand here, I perceive blueness. Now, to get a clear sense of the difference between this emerging logic of relations and customary propositional logic, compare these two sets of representations. First, an illustration from propositional logic: "the sky is blue," or "I see a blue sky." Now an illustration from the logic of relations: "there is blue here." We should expect the second judgment to stimulate listeners to ask, "Where? What are you talking about?" and this should elicit a second judgment, perhaps something like "I mean up there, in the sky." The second judgment borrow from propositional logic, but only for a moment: the speaker is trying to suggest that no single word like "the sky" would suffice to identify such a complex and vague experience. He said "up there" only to point to one aspect of the experience and to draw the interlocutor into dialogue, so that through the dialogue he might disclose more and more of his experience, drawing his listener into her own relation to what he saw. The meaning of what he reported is displayed only through his listener's *relation* to what he reported.

In this approach, *it takes a long time to offer and share judgments,*

because both the judgments and the communication of them are *relational*. The speaker did not merely "see blue"; he entered into a complex relation with a sky up there that is blue and much more. His goal in speaking of what he saw is to invite someone else into some aspect of this relation. Relation-building takes time.⁵

Within the world of everyday experience, judgments of the form 'sRb' might therefore sound like this: "there is ochre here, when this leaf is bent toward this side," or "I am drawn to that violet-blueness in this part of the sky as I walk home remembering mom, hoping for a better time and..." In the first case there is "oRb": some experience in which the "ochre" quality accompanies this activity of bending the leaf this way. In the second case we have "vRm": some experience in which the "violet-blueness" accompanies the whole series of associations I have with mother, the projects of today and so forth. In either case, "R" stands for what William James dubbed an aspect of "absolute experience," a fairly undifferentiated wholeness of the world that we perceive as a whole before we attend specifically to any of its parts.

It is as if Morning Prayer reminds us that our immediate experiences of the world may be vast and amazing before we whittle them down to the specific needs of the moment. It reminds us that, in each moment, we have available to us something much vaster and richer than what we believe we observe, distinctly, within it. But the bigger picture also allows the smaller one. While aRb might guide our judgments

about the whole, it could also guide judgments about particulars: it may indeed be appropriate to say that “the leaf is ochre” (A is y) when I take it and bend it this way in this light.⁶

Applied to scriptural language, “sRb” would, for example, model the way that the broad experience of a leaf (R) may, at a given moment, link my sense of the leaf’s beauty (s) to an occasion for uttering the traditional blessing for “He who has such beauty in His world” (b). The character of R is displayed only through narratives that I or we offer of R. Those who privilege the propositional model of judgment will most likely object that “if so, accounts of R are non-rational and you have only verified our assumption that, either R=f(x) or R, and Morning Prayer along with it, lies beyond the ken of reason.” Our reply is that “indeed, accounts of R are non-rational if rationality is identified only with the rules I set myself through my individual judgments; but that kind of rationality is limited to what I “I think,” displayed in a logic of propositions. Morning Prayer introduces us to other rationalities, however, in which the “I think” is brought into relation to what exceeds its grasp and its limits.

To return to our example, “R” refers to a field of experience and should not itself be considered rational or non-rational. “Rationality” may properly appear as the character of *some activity that we perform with respect to R or to any aRb* (or set of them): for example, activities of measuring, or building buildings out of, or talking about, or praying with regard to. Standards of rationality – just another name for stan-

dards for successful practice – should emerge from out of each activity as it is understood by the community or society that sponsors it. And this brings us to the next signal characteristic of a logic of relations: logics of relation are also logics *in relation*, displaying their rules of practice with respect to some community of practice – rather than presuming their rationality to be “of the world as it is.” Judgments articulated in scriptural language are articulated *for* particular communities of scriptural practitioners. This fact is displayed most clearly in the way Jewish Morning Prayer addresses the community of worshippers and not just the individual.

How the “I” comes to share in “We”

As we read it earlier, the prayer *baruch she amar* introduces the double wonder of Jewish worship: that the worshipper is both creature and potential imitator of the God “who spoke and the world was.” As we re-read the prayer now, our attention is drawn to the “I think” of the worshipper and how it may evolve from one to the other through the process of prayer.

Our *starting place* is with the “I” as only a mark that indicates the fact that there is a ‘subject here who may judge, be judged, and enter into relation,’ with any further details depending on specific contexts of action. The “I” is thus a mark of both agency *and* a dependence on others. These two are not mutually exclusive, but complementary yet different characteristics – the reason

why Morning Prayer may be redemptive for those of us nurtured in modern binarism: for us, the force of Morning Prayer is not to uproot our two warring tendencies but only to sweeten their conflictual difference into a complementary difference. The movement from this kind of war to this kind of peace begins with *praise*. Like the very first words of the morning – *mo-deh ani*, “Thankful am I” – the Verses of Praise all resituate the “I” from the place of master of a small universe to the place of a smaller someone in a vast



universe. The work of prayer will be to identify the company of other I’s with whom this one acts in the world and how they relate, one to the other and to the world.

Since the “I think” becomes the “I speak,” it is helpful to re-describe this “I in the company of others” as an “I in a chain of spoken-words,” where each I both hears words and speaks them, one I to another. If we characterize the spoken-word as a spoken unit of communication or sign, then we may re-characterize the “company I keep”

as a chain of signs –or a tradition. In these terms, all creatures participate in the chain of being created through the gift of God’s creating word. This chain implies that, while God creates distinct creatures, these creatures are not wholly distinct in the sense of being autonomous and self-referential: their identities implicate them in the existence of others. The being of each creature includes a manner of relating to the other creatures and thus to the creator as known through His creation. This is why to “be on earth” is

to belong to the world of “things,” *devarim*, or that which comes from the spoken-word (*dib-bur*). As depicted in both Genesis and Morning Prayer, creation is an on-going affair, rather than one of the past: a continual creating. As Martin Buber writes, “In the beginning was the Word”; in the beginning of each moment is a speaking out

of which all being is. So the creature is not merely a spoken-word but also a word-being-spoken, and “to be” such a creature is to be signified (to display the meaning of some speech) and to signify afresh (to offer oneself to another as a source of meaning).

Locating this truth and reality **is** also another way of comprehending what it may mean, in Morning Prayer, to say that “all creatures praise God.” It may mean that all of us creatures encounter one another as co-creatures of the one God and as brought into relation

through the one God. All creatures praise God through their relations one to the other throughout creation. To tell the story of any one life is therefore to offer a narrative about all lives. It is a story of *expansion*: of how our being implicates us in the whole of creation. And it is also a story of *contraction*: of the process of selection and attention that focuses within these stories to the one observation I seek to capture in a particular judgment. In this way, Morning Prayer both ennobles and humbles our personal agency: ennobling my sense of "I" as one who observes this world while also humbling my sense of "I" who am but one moment of relation within this vast universe of relations.

The hypothetical character of all of our judgments is a mark of the relational and social fabric of our being. Because our being is enmeshed in an indefinite series of relations, our indi-

vidual judgments are always selective, partial and therefore hypothetical. But the relational character of our being is also the source of our ability to test and confirm our judgments, learning, over time, which kinds of judgments tend to be more trustworthy than others and thus learning how it is possible to act in the world as if we saw things just as they were. On one level, we live in such intimacy with a myriad range of creatures that there are always more things to observe. On another level, we share such a unique relation with creatures that are most similar to us that we can speak to them, share and call on them directly to *help* us verify what we believe observed. These are members of our species, called "our people" (*'am*), with whom we share a unique relation that joins together the "I" who observes, that which I observe, and the creator of all that I observe.

NOTES

1. This is a condensed and revised version of an essay that first appeared as "Morning Prayer as Redemptive Thinking," in *Liturgy, Time, and the Politics of Redemption*, eds. Chad Pecknold and Randi Rashkover (Eerdmans Pub, 2006): 50-90.
2. Throughout, translations are adapted from the range of published translations of the traditional prayer book and from the Hebrew (see note 4 for sources).
3. Or fringed under-garment (*tallit katan*), depending on one's practice.
4. For the general theory behind this claim, see Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For a resource within Jewish tradition, see Bahya ibn Paquda, *Duties of the Heart* (New York: Feldheim, 1996).
5. Readers may note that there are parallels here to A.N. Whitehead's understanding of events and how we identify them. See, for example, the section "From Substances with Attributes to Events with Relations" in John B. Cobb, Jr., "Alfred North Whitehead," in David Ray Griffin et. AL., *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy* (New York: SUNY, 1993): 170ff. Also A.N. Whitehead, *The Principle of Relativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1922) and *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1929).
6. I am providing this cumbersome formula just to suggest that the patterns of identity displayed in something like "the leaf is ochre" ($A = y$) are meaningful as discrete elements *inside* of an overall experience, so that each pattern of identity is displayed in relation to some other one: in this case, the character of the leaf in relation to some way of manipulating the leaf. The reason for displaying a formula like this is to show that the discriminations modern logicians make can still be made in a logic of relatives, but only when there are situated within a vaster *process* of logical reasoning.



Ora et Labora: Seeking a Reason for Dialogue

by Jane Dammen McAuliffe

Just as Americans were getting into the full swing of the Christmas holidays in December of 2009, a plane landed in Detroit, Michigan, having narrowly escaped being blown apart on its flight from Amsterdam. Quick-witted passengers had subdued a young Nigerian Muslim who was apparently ready to kill himself and all those on the flight for reasons that conflate the categories of politics, religion, and global conflict. When those of us involved in interreligious dialogue heard this news, I sus-

pect we experienced a broad range of reactions: anger over the attack, fear for our fragility as individuals and as a nation, and perhaps some weariness at the thought of yet longer security lines in our airports. I remember the rush of all these thoughts, but there was another voice in my head, one that kept repeating, “Oh no, not again!” As someone who has spent decades working to achieve greater understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims, I knew that this incident—like so many others—would damage those efforts and would make this work even harder.

From the earliest years of my graduate courses in Islamic studies at the University of Toronto I have been involved in various forms of interreligious dialogue. I recall consulting for a series on revelation that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation produced in the mid-80s. During that same period, I served on the board of an early interfaith group that called itself Islam-West, and I also worked with the Christian-Muslim National Liaison Committee of Canada. After taking a position in the United States, at Emory University, I began to assist with the ecumenical and interfaith office of the U.S. Conference

of Catholic Bishops. This was followed by a decade-long tenure on the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims, a group that operated as a kind of think-tank for Roman Catholic outreach to the Muslim world. More recently, I have been involved with an annual gathering of Muslim and Christian scholars convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Known as "The Building Bridges Seminar," this initiative was launched as a response to 9/11, and its meetings alternate between Muslim and Western cities and sites. Over the last several years, I have convened with other scholars in London, Rome, and Washington, D.C., to discuss *A Common Word between Us and You*, an important document for interfaith understanding released in October 2007 by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute, headquartered in Amman, Jordan.¹

Formed by the past

Relations between religions have a very long history to which our contemporary contacts are heir. More specifically, relations between Christianity and Islam go back to the earliest years of Muhammad's prophethood. Scholars of the Qur'an hypothesize that Muhammad's preaching in both Mecca and Medina took place in a biblically-saturated environment. As he called his contemporaries to the worship of the one God, Muhammad could elliptically allude to narratives about Abraham, Moses, and Jesus because his audience knew these stories. They could fill in the blanks.

As the nascent Muslim community increasingly defined itself as differentiated from Judaism and Christianity, tensions and animosities with these earlier monotheistic traditions increased. By the first decades of the ninth century the Byzantine historian Theophanes (d. 817) would describe Muhammad in his *Chronicle* as a false prophet whose visions were nothing but epileptic seizures, who had learned a distorted form of Christianity from heretical monks, and who promised his warriors a paradise of sensual delights. A century earlier another chronicler, Bede (d. 735), had complained in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* of the Saracens, a Christian appellation for Muslims, who invaded and laid waste to Gaul but were eventually turned back in defeat. Even Bede's quarrel was not simply with Muslim militancy; it was also a theological dispute. The Qur'an states the terms and sets the limits of Christian error. The basic lines of dispute are straightforward: (1) God is not three; (2) God does not have sons; (3) Jesus was not crucified; and (4) the Bible has been falsified and misinterpreted.² This final charge presents an interesting dilemma because while claiming that the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament have been deliberately or inadvertently corrupted, medieval Muslim "biblical" scholars also searched these same scriptures for anticipatory attestations to the prophet Muhammad. They found him foretold in these preceding revelations.

Prominent Christian voices in the early centuries of Muslim-Christian controversy, theologians like John of

Damascus (d. 749) and Theodore Abu Qurrah (8th-9th), offer valuable clues to the key lines of contention. In these same centuries, a parallel, scholarly interest in science, medicine, and philosophy emerged in the Arab world via the Arabic translations of Greek and Hellenistic works. By the 11th and 12th centuries, the Crusades stimulated yet another wave of interest in Islam and Muslims, much of it fanciful and intended to incite hatred of the foe. Yet, in this era also, a scholarly counterbalance surfaced. Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny (c. 1094 – 1156), visited Spain from 1142-1143. There he commissioned the translation of the qur’anic paraphrase by Robert of Ketton. Ketton’s translation circulated widely in many manuscripts until its printing in the 16th century. The motivation for this project could best be captured in the precept: “Know the enemy, but do so with accuracy.”

Three centuries later, Nicolas of Cusa (d. 1464) wrote *De pace fidei, On the Peace of Faith*, a treatise in which he envisioned a heavenly meeting of representatives from all nations and religions in dialogue with the Word of God. This would be *una religio in varietate rituum*, one religion but a variety of rites. The goal of the dialogue was still conversion to the fullness of truth in Christianity but not by degrading other religions. They were to remain objects of respect. Nicolas of Cusa also produced *Cribratio Alkorani (Sifting the Koran)*, an apologetic argument prompted by his reading of Ketton’s Qur’an translation.

Beginning with Rome and rippling outward

Moving forward by five centuries, let us examine the contemporary world of Muslim-Christian interaction, touching upon key events and tracking significant developments. On October 28, 1965, Pope Paul VI proclaimed *Nostra Aetate*, one of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Council (2221 bishops approved it and 81 voted against it).³ *Nostra Aetate* is the shortest of the 16 documents from Vatican II, just 41 sentences in 5 paragraphs. The section on Islam begins with a succinct summary of Muslim belief:

The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Nostra Aetate then acknowledges the difficult history:

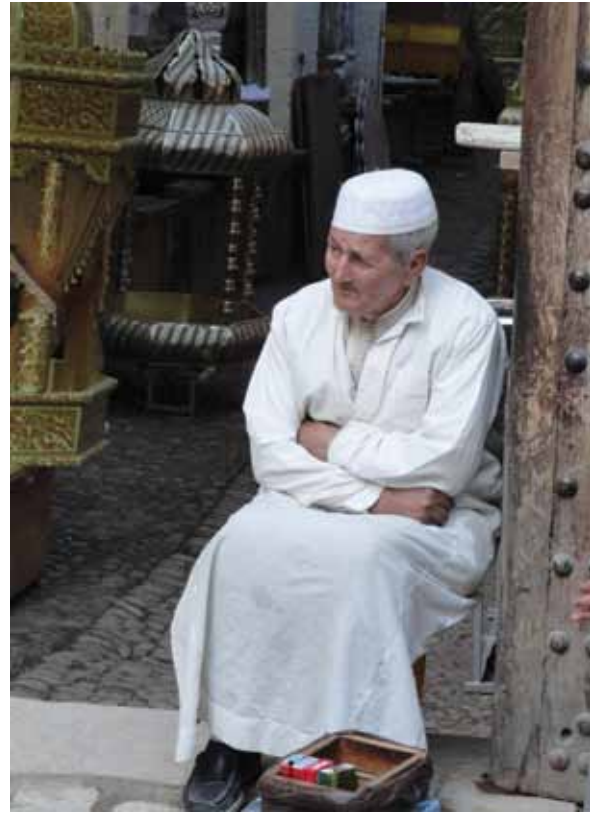
Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this

sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind, social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

There is a clear and explicit call to dialogue:

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that *through dialogue and collaboration* [italics added for emphasis] with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

At a distance of almost fifty years, it is hard to realize what a revolution in Catholic thinking these words and their subsequent implementation constituted. Yet the 60s were a decisive decade in many ways, not least of all in how they shaped the future of inter-religious relations. The years immediately preceding had witnessed independence movements that redrew the map of the world: in 1947, the creation of Pakistan; in 1954, the British withdrawal from Suez; in 1960, Congo's independence from Belgium; in 1962, the end of the Algerian war. With declarations of independence, leadership often passed from colonial overlords—British, French, Dutch, Italian—to Muslim presidents and prime ministers. In North America, changes in immigration laws were another major legacy of the 60s, one that has redrawn the religious



landscape of the United States and Canada.

But returning to *Nostra Aetate* and its aftermath: Prior to proclaiming *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican established the Secretariat for Non-Christians (1964), later renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (1988). Its mandate is “to promote mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between Catholics and the followers of others religious traditions; to encourage the study of religions; to promote the formation of persons dedicated to dialogue.” The beginnings were quiet and cautious with a limited agenda of international meetings and conferences. Not only did this new initiative face a long history of animosities, compli-

cated by current issues in international relations, but there was also the ever-present suspicion of intent: Was this simply missionary activity in disguise?

After 1987 the operations of the Pontifical Council grew more rapidly under the executive leadership of Bishop Michael Fitzgerald. By 1989 he had organized colloquia with the World Islamic Call Society in Libya and with Jordan's Prince Hassan bin Talal and the Jordanian Aal al-Bayt Institute. Meetings began in 1994 with the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and in 2000 with the Al-Azhar in Cairo, the oldest and most prestigious university in the Muslim world. 2000 was also the year that Pope John Paul II visited Cairo as part of the jubilee year commemoration. The Permanent Committee of Al-Azhar for Dialogue with Monotheistic Religions continues to convene annually with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

The momentum created by *Nostra Aetate* also generated action in the United States. Local parish and diocesan initiatives throughout the 1980s attracted the attention of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. In 1986 they created a Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, and in 1991 meetings began between Muslim and Christian participants. Eventually these developed into three annual series of dialogues, in the Midwest (1996) with the Islamic Society of North America, on the East Coast (1998) with the Islamic Circle of North America, and on the West Coast (2000) with the Orange County Shura Advisory Council. In a recent report on the more than twenty

years of this tripartite dialogue, two important results of this work were noted: (1) Over two hundred Muslim and Christian leaders have gotten to know each other well and have acquired a much deeper knowledge of the other's faith tradition. (2) When an interreligious dispute or difficulty occurs on the regional or local level, there is now a solid network of relationships ready to respond.

While Rome may have developed the most extensive global dialogue outreach, other American denominations and educational institutions have also sustained decades-long forms of engagement, such as the National Council of Churches, the Hartford Seminary, and Georgetown University. Beyond American borders, one can find many other forms and forums of interreligious engagement. For example, the 1989 publication of *Trying to Answer the Questions*⁴ represents the work of a group of priests, nuns, and lay people living in Tunisia who, for more than 15 years, gathered regularly to prepare responses to the questions that were typically asked by their Muslim friends and colleagues. They were motivated by 1 Peter 3, 15: "To have our answer ready for people who ask us the reason for that hope that we all have."

The format of their responses acknowledges the Muslim mindset underlying the question, the Muslim view on the question and then the present state of Christian teaching. Here are some of the topics: Do Christians recognize the prophethood of Muhammad? Why don't priests and nuns marry? Are Christians really monotheists or do they



believe in three gods? Why are there four Gospels and not just one? Which is the real one? On Christian prayer: How do you perform Christian prayer? Why do you pray with bread and wine? Do you really believe that God is present in this bread and wine? That you “eat” God? What’s in that little box on the altar? What’s the difference between Mass in a big church on Sunday and weekday Masses in a small chapel?

The rupture that reorients

While the last third of the twentieth century certainly saw ever-expanding efforts in Christian outreach to Muslims, with some modest reciprocity, any future historian of interreligious dialogue will recognize September 11, 2001 as a watershed moment. At that time, I was the Dean of Arts and Sci-

ences at Georgetown University, and I vividly remember our students standing on their dorm roofs and gazing down the Potomac at the smoke billowing from the Pentagon. Even more vividly, I recall the way that students, both Christian and Jewish, reached out to their Muslim classmates in solidarity and support. And I remember the way that my phone started ringing off the hook with requests for interviews, lectures, and panel presentations. Suddenly, people across the United States awoke to the Muslim presence in America and to how little they knew about one of the biggest religions on the globe.

The search for knowledge and understanding generated an explosion of interfaith initiatives at all levels—local, national, and international. One initiative to which I have given much time and attention for almost a decade is

the “Building Bridges Seminar.” This began in January 2002 when George Carey, as Archbishop of Canterbury, convened a gathering of prominent Muslim and Christian religious leaders at Lambeth Palace in London. Out of that first encounter grew a yearly, international dialogue led by Carey’s successor, Archbishop Rowan Williams.⁵ The site of the annual meeting alternates between a Muslim country and a Christian or Western one. Meetings to date have been held in Doha, Istanbul, London, Rome, Sarajevo, Singapore, and Washington, D.C. In my experience, the format and structure of this dialogue have proven to be particularly effective. A group of between 25 – 30 Muslim and Christian scholars gathers for several days of intensive study and discussion. The core membership of this group has stayed fairly constant over its entire duration but each year additions to this core are invited from the city and country that is hosting the meeting. The focus of our study and discussion is a selection of biblical and qur’anic passages keyed to the theme selected for that year’s gathering. Some of the themes explored have been: “Muslims, Christians, and the Common Good” (Sarajevo, 2005);⁶ “Justice and Rights: Christians and Muslim Perspectives” (Washington, D.C., 2006);⁷ and “Communicating the Word: Revelation, Translation, and Interpretation” (Rome, 2008).⁸ Members of the Seminar break into working sessions for intensive analysis of the assigned scriptural texts, assisted by the scholarly expertise of the respective participants. This scriptural specificity grounds the discussions,

tethering us to the texts and keeping the conversation from floating off into pious generalities. As a balance to these closed working sessions, the Building Bridges Seminar usually offers several presentations by some of the scholar participants that are open to the public.

Two factors are essential to the effectiveness of this methodology. (1) The first is core continuity within the group of Muslim and Christian scholars. This continuity allows trust and mutual confidence to develop and that is crucial. When dialogue groups of Muslims and Christians first form there is a strong tendency for participants to adopt the posture of “professional Christian” or “professional Muslim.” It is hard to avoid feeling that one has to operate as a worthy “representative” of one’s faith. But this representational posture precludes genuine dialogue. Only after repeated contact and conversation do the barriers begin to fall. People begin to speak out of their personal faith and experience. Then the dialogue comes alive and mutual understanding can move to a deeper level. (2) The second factor for success is a commitment to advance preparation and study, especially of the selected scriptural texts. Successful dialogue cannot be built upon anything less than serious and sustained study. Unlike airline travel, “winging it” is not an option, at least if you want to get anywhere.

Local initiatives have also surged in the wake of September 11. A few years ago, I published a review of a book entitled *Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America*,

written by the journalist Gus Niebuhr.⁹ It is a wonderful account of his travels across this country, exploring events like the annual “Festival of Faiths” organized by the Catholic cathedral in Louisville, Kentucky and the “Open Mosque Days” hosted by Muslim communities in Los Angeles. Niebuhr, who had written for *The New York Times* about the backlash against American Muslims that followed the fall of the Twin Towers, wanted to find the “quiet countertrend” of interfaith efforts that were springing up in all parts of the U.S.

Fortunately, in looking for that “countertrend,” he did not limit himself to Christian activities. For decades the world of Christian-Muslim dialogue was lopsided, with many more efforts initiated by Christian groups than by Muslim. But that, too, began to change rapidly after September 11th. At the end of Ramadan in 2004, King Abdullah of Jordan issued the *Amman Message*, a call for intra-Islamic tolerance and unity and a reiteration of the basic beliefs and principles of Islam.¹⁰ Repeatedly, the *Amman Message* rejects distortions of these beliefs:

“No day has passed, but that this religion [Islam] has been at war against extremism, radicalism and fanaticism, for they veil the intellect from foreseeing negative consequences [of one’s actions]. Such blind impetuosity falls outside the human regulations pertaining to religion, reason and character. They are not from the true character of the tolerant, accepting Muslim.”

“Islam rejects extremism, radicalism, and fanaticism—just as all noble,

heavenly religions reject them—considering them as recalcitrant ways and forms of injustice.”

“We denounce and condemn extremism, radicalism and fanaticism today, just as our forefathers tirelessly denounced and opposed them throughout Islamic history.”¹¹

After issuing the *Amman Message*, King Abdullah sent 3 questions to 24 of the Muslim world’s most eminent scholars. The scholars were selected to represent the internal diversity of the Muslim community. The three questions were: (1) *Who is a Muslim?* (2) *Is it permissible to declare someone an apostate (takfir)?* (3) *Who has the right to undertake issuing fatwas (legal rulings)?* Within the following year, a number of important conferences were mounted by major international organizations in the Muslim world to address these issues.¹²

Although the *Amman Message* does not deal directly with interfaith dialogue, it promotes an intra-Islamic unity that can create a helpful context for interfaith work. Speaking generally, there is a fundamental asymmetry in the religious structures of dialogue work between Christianity and Islam. Christian denominations, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, have clearly identifiable official bodies who can function in a representational fashion. Islam is far less officially hierarchical. Authority is more distributed, and it is consequently more difficult to determine who can “speak” for Islam.

In October 2007, a subsequent Muslim effort to speak with a more unified voice appeared, arguably the

most significant dialogue initiative to issue from the Muslim world to date. Titled *A Common Word between Us and You*, this open letter's initial 138 signatories included Muslim scholars and religious leaders from around the world.¹³ A year earlier, a shorter letter had been released by a smaller group (38) in response to Pope Benedict XVI's lecture at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006, a lecture in which he quoted a fourteenth-century Byzantine emperor's (Manuel II Palaiologos) denunciation of the prophet Muhammad.¹⁴ Although it's fair to say that the Pope's use of that quotation was misinterpreted, it is equally undeniable that it seriously damaged Catholic-Muslim relations. The 2007 letter seeks to find its common ground or "common word" in the centrality for Islam and Christianity of love of God and love of neighbor. Drawing upon biblical and qur'anic quotations, it foregrounds those passages that express this mutually acceptable message.

The reception of the letter and the response to it have been extraordinary.¹⁵ Major conferences were held at Yale, Cambridge, and Georgetown universities and important discussions hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope. Papers and books have been prepared and citations from the document in public lectures have proliferated. The Vatican's primary response, in addition to references to the document in several papal speeches, was a meeting of Muslim and Christian scholars and religious leaders in November 2008, billed as the first Catholic Muslim Forum. As a participant in that meet-

ing, I can attest to the attention with which the document was discussed and to the care with which the conference's final declaration was prepared. One key quotation from that declaration captures the Forum's tone: "We profess that Catholics and Muslims are called to be instruments of love and harmony among believers, and for humanity as a whole, renouncing any oppression, aggressive violence and terrorism, especially that committed in the name of religion, and upholding the principles of justice for all."¹⁶

What's the point?

"Renouncing any oppression, aggressive violence and terrorism": necessary words, important words, but what effect do they have? Does all this dialoguing make any difference? Or is it just a way to generate feel-good sentiments among those who give their time to it? These are questions that have preoccupied me during all the years in which I have given energy and attention to these efforts. I know from private conversations that they are questions that perplex many of my fellow scholars and religious leaders who also engage in interfaith work.

Serious interfaith conversations can be tough, tense work. Dialogue engagements are not all "campfires and Kum by Yah." In the United States and other countries, there is a rising fear of Islam and a growing prejudice against it. Understandably, this can leave Muslim participants feeling defensive and embattled.

Furthermore, many meetings in which I have participated over the years have been haunted by the specter of American foreign policies. America is not universally admired and loved, and in many parts of the world the United States is seen as an oppressive power bent upon realizing its own national interests regardless of the effects on others. The tragedy of unending conflict in the Middle East can infiltrate interfaith conversations in both expected and unexpected ways. President Obama's Cairo speech on 4 June 2009 addressed the world Muslim community and spoke to the challenges presented by (1) Iraq and Afghanistan; (2) Israel, Palestine, and the Arab world; (3) nuclear proliferation; (4) the promotion of democracy; (5) religious freedom; (6) women's rights; and (7) economic development and opportunity.

Dialogue can be dangerous. A deeply engaged form of the "dialogue of life" was that practiced by the Trappists of Tibhirine, a group of French monks who lived a life of prayerful witness within a mountainous Muslim community in Algeria. In March 1996 they were kidnapped during a particularly bitter period of the Algerian civil war and assassinated two months later.

Quite frankly, dialogue can also be boring. After years of engagement all conversations can begin to sound the same. People enter dialogue meetings with different levels of experience and different kinds of interfaith socialization. It takes time for each participant to build sufficient confidence in the

process to feel safe in moving beyond bland generalities.

Perhaps the most vexing problem in interfaith work is what I have come to call the "monolith and the many." Countless times I have heard participants preface their remarks with categorical statements like "Islam says . . ." or "Christianity asserts that . . ." I'm always tempted to respond "Whose Islam?" "Whose Christianity?" Religions are not monovocal. They do not speak with one voice, yet the temptation to pontificate—to use a decidedly Catholic term—and to speak in universals can be overwhelming in dialogue situations.

A variant of this dilemma is the perplexing issue of "who's the host?" and "who's the guest?" The religious group that invites, that initiates the process, ordinarily sets the agenda. As I mentioned earlier, for decades the preponderance of such initiatives lay with Christian organizations and denominations. Not surprisingly, the focus given to a particular dialogue meeting ordinarily drew from Christian categories and experience. Religions do not line up symmetrically, as the early "comparativists" quickly learned. Consequently, there can be an immediate sense of discomfort experienced by Muslim participants as they try to adjust their thoughts and perspectives to these Christian-oriented categories.

So why bother?

A rehearsal of the difficulties associated with interfaith dialogue sharpens the question: “What’s the point?” “Why bother?” The best—and maybe the only—answer is that we have no choice. If we do not try and try again to understand each other, to reach out to each other, the walls grow higher, the misperceptions and misunderstandings multiply, tensions trigger eruptions that escalate too rapidly. But the justifications for interfaith dialogue are not all preventive and precautionary. There are very positive reasons for the pursuit of interreligious understanding and quite genuine benefits that accrue to those who engage.

In seeking these reasons, I find it important to remember that dialogue takes several forms. A four-fold typology has become a popular way to categorize this. What I have described so far in this essay is dubbed the “dialogue of discourse”, i.e. the discussion of religious beliefs and practices. But there is also the “dialogue of life” when people of different faiths share the same community or workplace. There is the “dialogue of action” when faith groups come together around a common cause, whether this is confronting poverty or supporting environmental sustainability. Finally, there is the “dialogue of spirituality” with the interfaith practice of prayer and meditation. Monastics, both Buddhist and Christian, have a decades-long history of this final form of dialogue with figures like the late Thomas Merton, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the current Dalai Lama being especially prominent proponents.

Fundamentally, honest dialogue expands our understanding of each other. Every conversation illuminates some as-yet-unrealized area of comprehension. Religious believers as the living, breathing embodiments of their traditions represent an ever-new source of insight into the multi-faceted aspects of their respective traditions.

Deepening insights and expanded knowledge of another’s traditions inevitably breaks down negative impressions and preconceptions. I am often asked to introduce audiences to Islam and the Qur’an. When I am able to accept these invitations, I almost invariably find myself in front of people who are afraid. Not all of them but a significant percentage. In the United States there is a widespread and growing fear of Islam and Muslims. America is a nation at war with a Muslim country and beset with the threat and the realities of terrorism. The media feeds this fear with its relentless depictions of violence committed for ostensibly religious reasons.

Events like the aborted bomb on the Detroit flight mentioned at the beginning of this article heighten fear levels, as do articles like the *New York Times* profile of the American jihadist, Omar Hammami.¹⁷ So often, in my long years as a scholar and a speaker on Islam, it has felt like “for every two steps forward, there’s one step back.” But that is the reason I remain engaged with dialogue work. I am confident that each encounter, each conversation is a pebble in the pool. Its effects ripple outward.

On a yet more personal level, interfaith dialogue creates friendship and trust. In fact, for dialogue to be productive, ever-deeper trust is indispensable. That is an important factor in the success of the Building Bridges Seminar and in other, longstanding interfaith efforts that expand well beyond the initial, polite exchanges.

Dialogue pushes theology. As the experience of believers from different faiths outstrips the official doctrines and declarations of their religious bodies, a theology-from-the-ground-up forges ahead. Assertions of theological exclusivity ring hollow when people see the good in each other, when they witness how another's faith prompts actions that build a better future for us all.

Increasingly, dialogue efforts, particularly on the local and regional level, move beyond talk to action. A few years ago, I heard about the Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston and its head, Rabbi Elliott Gershenson. At the time I was helping to organize a private meeting for the Prince of Wales and a group of American interfaith leaders and activists. When I called Rabbi Gershenson to invite him to this gathering, I learned about the extraordinary disaster relief work that his group had done in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Because of the emergency response procedures already in place, Interfaith Ministries was able to quickly place hurricane refugees in Houston homes and connect them with needed social services.

I can also point to a consequence or benefit that may not have geopolitical importance but which does affect lives.

Virtually everyone whom I have come to know through interfaith engagements has told me that his or her own faith has been strengthened by participation in dialogue meetings. As you try to explain your faith to another and listen to that person's attempt to do the same, you reengage with your own religious formation, your own spiritual heritage. Probably my most profound experience of this truth was at a conference in Rome a few years ago that was convened to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*. During the concluding session, one speaker after another—all of them with long experience in dialogue—rose to testify to this spiritual transformation. I dwell on this because it flies in the face of the concern mentioned earlier, that interfaith dialogue is a form of covert proselytizing that will weaken or destroy one's faith.

Yet returning to the four-fold typology that I mentioned earlier may reveal the strongest reason for interfaith dialogue. It is the first and last of parts of the typology that prompt the initial words of this article's title, *ora et labora*. 'Prayer and work' captures the essence of the Benedictine rule and it also captures the dynamism of dialogue. In the best interfaith encounters, there are instances in which the intellectual and the spiritual intersect, where emergent understanding opens a window to worship. The level of discourse shifts subtly and the sense of finally seeing through another's eyes becomes a prayerful moment. The most recent Building Bridges Seminar, which convened in May 2011 in Doha, devoted itself to the topic of prayer and the intersections of

ora et labora during this meeting were particularly powerful. The dialogue of discourse and the dialogue of spiritual-

ity came together and created a space where interfaith exchange and periods of prayer could merge.

NOTES

1. The document is available here <http://www.acommonword.com/>.
2. See Qur'an 5:73, 4:171; 2:116, 4:171; 4:157; 2:75, 3:78.
3. The text of the *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Age) is available on the Vatican's website: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.
4. *Trying to Answer Questions* (Rome: Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, 1989).
5. Two websites serve as a home for these seminars: <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2833> and http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/networks/building_bridges
6. Michael Ipgrave, editor, *Building a Better Bridge: Muslims, Christians, and the Common Good*, a record of the fourth Building Bridges Seminar held in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, May 15-18, 2005 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008).
7. Michael Ipgrave, editor, *Justice and Rights: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, a record of the fifth Building Bridges Seminar held in Washington, D.C., March 27-30, 2006 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009).
8. David Marshall, editor, *Communicating the Word: Revelation, Translation, and Interpretation in Christianity and Islam*, a record of the seventh Building Bridges Seminar held in Rome, Italy, May 5-8, 2008 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011.)
9. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "What Holds Us Together," review of *Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America*, by Gustav Niebuhr, *America: The Catholic National Weekly* (2008) 199, 10. http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11095
10. The Amman Message can be found at its official website <http://www.ammanmessage.com/>
11. Amman Message pamphlet, p. 9-10. <http://ammanmessage.com/media/Amman-Mesage-pdf-booklet-v-2-5-2-08.pdf>
12. Following the responses to these three questions, another conference was held in Jordan in 2005 to explore them further. The conference resulted in three points of agreement among the scholars present which were published under the title *Three Points of the Amman Message*. This document can be found at <http://www.ammanmessage.com/> and page 16 of the Amman Message pamphlet, <http://ammanmessage.com/media/Amman-Mesage-pdf-booklet-v-2-5-2-08.pdf>
13. The text of this document can be found at the website <http://www.acommonword.com/>
14. This open letter can be found at <http://www.ammanmessage.com/media/openLetter/english.pdf>. Pope Benedict XVI's lecture can be found at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html
15. Many of these responses are available at the website <http://www.acommonword.com/>
16. The final declaration from this forum can be found here http://acommonword.com/en/attachments/108_FinalFinalCommunique.pdf
17. Andrea Elliot, "The Jihadist Next Door," *The New York Times*, Sunday Magazine, January 31, 2010; available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/31/magazine/31Jihadist-t.html>.





The Yoga of Hesychasm

by James S. Cutsinger

I must begin with a few words of caution. This article is meant to cast light on a short mystical poem, “The Ladder of Divine Graces” by Theophanis the Monk. We know very little about Theophanis, not even when he lived. All we are sure of is that he was a monastic of the Christian East, one among the monks of Mounts Athos and Sinai, whose quest towards *hesychia* or stillness has given rise to their designation as the Hesychast Fathers. Here is where a first warning comes in. Nothing I shall be saying is going to make the slightest sense unless my reader understands at the outset that for Theophanis Christianity is a mystagogical path, a way toward what is. It is not a creed, it is not a rite, and it is not an ethic. Or rather, while it includes all these things on the surface, in its essence it is the means of our becoming Divine.

A second caveat has to do with the expectations one brings to these brief remarks. We need to be modest. Into these seventy-one lines of verse are distilled over a thousand years of spiritual teaching and ascetic discipline. The poem contains what amounts to an alchemical tincture, very concentrated and very potent, and my hope is simply to offer a taste of the resulting

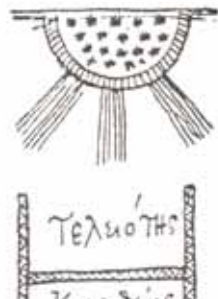
elixir. There is no question of providing an exhaustive interpretation of this tradition. I wish only to highlight a few salient ideas, while underscoring the poet’s own repeated stress on experience. *Experience teaches one, he says, not words.* Whatever else, the author means to prick the conscience of anyone who supposes that doctrine can stand alone without method, theory without practice. We need the effectual means of liberation supplied by a genuine yoga.

I have mentioned how little is known of this writer. This fact is a great blessing, of course. By providing the ready excuse of necessity, it permits us cheerfully to dispense with that whole apparatus of biographical and other horizontal detail that so often intrudes between a text and its interpreters. My only concession to the usual academic procedure is to admit that “The Ladder” can be found in the third volume of *The Philokalia*, a classic compilation of Christian mystical writings ranging from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries. Beyond that, I would ask that one think of “Theophanis” strictly as a symbol for the spiritual search, and of his poem as but a provocation for entering the Supreme Reality.

***The Ladder of Divine Graces
which experience has made known to those
inspired by God***

The first step is that of purest prayer.
From this there comes a warmth of heart,
And then a strange, a holy energy,
Then tears wrung from the heart, God-given.
Then peace from thoughts of every kind.
From this arises purging of the intellect,
And next the vision of heavenly mysteries.
Unheard-of light is born from this ineffably,
And thence, beyond all telling, the heart's illumination.
Last comes—a step that has no limit
Though compassed in a single line—
Perfection that is endless.

The ladder's lowest step
Prescribes pure prayer alone.
But prayer has many forms:
My discourse would be long
Were I now to speak of them:
And, friend, know that always
Experience teaches one, not words.
A ladder rising wondrously to heaven's vault:
Ten steps that strangely vivify the soul.
Ten steps that herald the soul's life.
A saint inspired by God has said:
Do not deceive yourself with idle hopes
That in the world to come you will find life
If you have not tried to find it in this present world.
Ten steps: a wisdom born of God.
Ten steps: fruit of all the books.
Ten steps that point towards perfection.
Ten steps that lead one up to heaven.
Ten steps through which a man knows God.
The ladder may seem short indeed,
But if your heart can inwardly experience it
You will find a wealth the world cannot contain,
A god-like fountain flowing with unheard-of life.
This ten-graced ladder is the best of masters,
Clearly teaching each to know its stages.
If when you behold it
You think you stand securely on it,
Ask yourself on which step you stand,
So that we, the indolent, may also profit.
My friend, if you want to learn about all this,
Detach yourself from everything,
From what is senseless, from what seems intelligent.
Without detachment nothing can be learnt.



Experience alone can teach these things, not talk.
 Even if these words once said
 By one of God's elect strike harshly,
 I repeat them to remind you:
 He who has no foothold on this ladder,
 Who does not ponder always on these things,
 When he comes to die will know
 Terrible fear, terrible dread,
 Will be full of boundless panic.
 My lines end on a note of terror.
 Yet it is good that this is so:
 Those who are hard of heart—myself the first—
 Are led to repentance, led to a holy life,
 Less by the lure of blessings promised
 Than by fearful warnings that inspire dread.
 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
 You who have written this, hear, then, and take note:
 Void of all these graces,
 How have you dared to write such things?
 How do you not shudder to expound them?
 Have you not heard what Uzzah suffered
 When he tried to stop God's ark from falling?
 Do not think that I speak as one who teaches:
 I speak as one whose words condemn himself,
 Knowing the rewards awaiting those who strive,
 Knowing my utter fruitlessness.

As my readers will have noticed, the text falls naturally into several distinct parts. First, there is a labeling of the ten steps of the ladder; second, an emphasis on the special importance of the initial step, purity in prayer; third, a listing of the ladder's benefits; fourth, a request for assistance from persons further advanced than the author; fifth, stern counsel for those who are just beginning, together with a justification for this severity; and sixth, the author's concluding self-reproach and effacement. An entire article could be written on any one of these headings. What I shall do here is to concentrate on the meaning of the ten steps themselves,

adding then a few broader strokes concerning the rest of the poem.

First, though, just a word or two concerning the title. In a sense, the title of this poem says it all: *The Ladder of Divine Graces*. The man who seeks union with God must understand before he even begins his search that synergy or cooperation is the key to his movement, a cooperation between human effort and Divine mercy. A ladder must be climbed, and the climbing is accomplished one step at a time. The spiritual life demands real work, real movement, real discipline, which proceeds methodically and incrementally. It is dangerous, says Plato, to go too quickly from the many to the One, and

the Hesychast tradition takes account of this fact in distrusting ecstasies and consolations not grounded in method. On the other hand, one must not forget that man's climbing is not only toward God; it is in and by God. Each of the rungs of the ladder is a gift or a grace, a real and efficacious presence of the Goal in the very midst of the way. True spirituality is not Pelagian, not a self-help technique. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for *God is at work within you*" (Phil. 2:12-13).

The subtitle confirms this synergy. The authority of the poem's teaching is at once human and Divine. On one level it is a matter of embodied truth. What we are about to be told is no rarified speculation, concocted by some spiritual dreamer whose claims are untestable. It comes instead rooted in the concrete, the practical, the immediate, and it leads beyond mere credulity or acceptance to certainty. Notice that *experience* has made the ladder *known*. But at the same time, the knowledge is thanks to God, who has mercifully condescended to *those inspired* by Him. We should be grateful. Authentic wisdom is never man's alone, an accomplishment or achievement for which he can take credit. The *wisdom born of God* is to know that God knows Himself in us.

Turning now to the poem itself, one observes that each of the ten steps of the ladder can be distinguished by a single noun. The journey passes through the several stages of *prayer, heart, energy, tears, peace, purging, vision, light, illumination, and perfection*. But the nouns in each case are to be

specified by adjectives. It is not just any prayer, but *purest* prayer that counts; not just any heart, but a *warm* one. So also we note that the energy is *holy*, the tears are *God-given*, the peace is mental, the purging is intellectual, the vision is mystical, the light is ineffable, the illumination is cardiac, and the perfection is *endless*.

"Theophanis" is careful to stress that the prayer of step one is of a most particular kind. Prayer may include but is more than a collection of petitions and praises, whether private or public, spoken or silent, personal or canonical. In its purest form, it is an imageless attention to the Divine presence, ontologically rather than discursively linked to its object, and often supported by the repetition of a short invocatory formula like the Jesus Prayer. Please note that the attention of this opening step is itself a highly advanced spiritual state, presupposing a background not even hinted at in the poem. Our exposition of the text obliges us to begin at a point far beyond what most of us may be ready for. Quintessential prayer is the bottom rung of a ladder that must first be set on a living sacramental foundation, and its scaling assumes a deliberate and extensive propaedeutic under the guidance of a spiritual father. The Christian mystical tradition knows very well that individual initiatives and exploits are always ruinous in the contemplative life. Hence the author's deference, in the lines below, to his own elders and betters: to *a saint inspired by God* and to *one of God's elect*.

Were a man granted the grace of this first step—were those of us writing

and reading this article truly prepared to go further—it would soon be discovered that true prayer is a transformative power, which begins to work its magic within the tissues of the human body itself. This is noticed initially, the Hesychasts teach, in that central part of the body, the *heart*, where pure consciousness dwells, and the most common signal of change is a sensation of *warmth*. Warmth, like the heart, is no metaphor. Something really begins to happen in the breast. One could say that it happens in and to the four-chambered beating muscle if the concern is to stress, as one must, the material actuality of the process. But at the same time, the warmth comes as proof that our true heart was always more than its concealment in matter, more than just a physical pump. In either case, the ladder brings the whole man into play. The body is not left behind in our approach to full union, but is lifted up and drawn into its Divine prototype. Heaven is more, not less, solid than earth.

And then a strange, a holy energy. What was true at first for the central organ alone gradually makes itself felt throughout the entire human organism. A centrifugal radiation of power begins now to course outward through the various envelopes of the self. *Energy* is a technical term in this context. Western philosophy is accustomed to a distinction between form and matter. Energy is the third that connects these two, the living and interior pulse through which essence communicates itself as substance. If we picture what a thing is as a center and how it appears as a sphere, then the radii are an im-

age of its energy. God too has His own kind of energy, the effective and salvific presence of the Transcendent in the domain of the immanent. “Theophanis” is certainly no pantheist: the Divine Essence remains like an asymptote forever beyond our aspiration as creatures. Nevertheless we may participate fully in the Divine Substance and come to share in God’s powers through an assimilation of His *holy* energies. The nexus of this exchange is man’s heart, an exchange which begins when our own center moves toward coincidence with the center of God.

Tears, the fourth step, are a mark of this concentric shift. Not just any tears, however: only those that are *God-given*. It is very important that we not confuse the “gift of tears”, as it is sometimes called, with ordinary sorrow or grief. Climbing the ladder means mastering the passions, including the self-pity, resentment, and anger which sometimes express themselves in crying. We are to become objective toward our ego, no longer controlled by its sentimental involvement in the shifting play of the world. *Detach yourself from everything*, says “Theophanis”. For *without detachment nothing can be learnt*. The tears of the ladder are not tears of selfish regret or refusal. On the contrary, they are the natural result of the ego’s liquefaction. As the radiant energy of God carries the heart’s warmth forward through the rest of our organism, the many layers of ice begin melting. We become the warm, soft water of our tears. The warmth is our fervor and longing for God; the softness is our yielding to the Divine in-



flux; the water is the power of our newfound passivity.

The next pair of steps may be usefully treated as one, for they are two sides of a single coin: *peace from thoughts* and *purging of the intellect*. Notice that the peace is from thoughts of every kind. This is no power of positive thinking, which would simply replace bad or debilitating conceptions with good ones. The Hesychast follows a path leading beyond conception as such. By *thoughts* he means any product of discursive mentation, any recording of the impressions of sense and any abstraction therefrom or combination thereof. He knows that our waking life is dominated by the mental chatter that comes from the jostling and sorting of these impressions, images, ideas, and feelings, and that our so-called waking is therefore truly a dreaming. We are never simply now in the present, so fully

occupied is our mind by the memory of what was and the *idle hopes* of what will be.

Against all of this must be placed an altogether different quality of attention, superintended by what the Christian East calls the *nous* or *intellect*. Unlike discursive thinking, which proceeds sequentially with the information it has gleaned from the surface of things, the intellective or noetic faculty goes straight to their core, contemplating the inner *logoi* or essences of creatures by direct apprehension. Present in all of us but dormant in most, the intellect is first awakened and set into motion by the efforts of prayer and ascetic discipline. Once purged of the encrusting dross which surrounds it, the noetic faculty becomes in turn a purging or purifying force of its own. Cutting through the veils of forgetfulness and piercing to the world's very marrow, it there discovers by recollection its own inward content. "For, behold, the kingdom of God is *within you*" (Luke 17:21).

"Theophanis" has incorporated within his own ten-fold sequence a more common and better known distinction among three basic stages in the spiritual life: purification, illumination, and union. The first of these has been the subject of the poem to this point, beginning with *purest* prayer in step one and culminating with the *purging* of the intellect in step six. His aim has been to describe the indispensable initial work of repentance, a negative movement away from illusion and death. Now we begin glimpsing the positive results of that work, for

the next three steps are all concerned in some way with vision and light, and thus with the second fundamental stage of illumination. There is a *vision of heavenly mysteries*, next the perception of *unheard-of light*, and then the *illumination* of the heart itself.

Now please understand, the *mysteries* which "Theophanis" has in view are not secret facts or formulas, nor is the fruit of his path a knowledge of celestial statistics. If one were foolish enough to be interested in dating the end of the world or in the names and properties of discarnate masters or in how many lives one might have lived before now—or in any of the other bits and pieces of occult information so often dangled before the curious and restless seekers of our day—one would have to go elsewhere. "Theophanis" has counseled detachment not only from *what is senseless* but from *what seems intelligent*, and this latter category doubtless includes much of what passes for spirituality in this so-called new age. He knows that a true mystery by definition exceeds the form of data, no matter how peculiar or enticing those data might be. The inner is always inner even in the midst of our seeing it. Etymology is important here: the term *mystery* comes from the Greek verb *muo*, which refers to a closing or shutting of the eyes and mouth. The *vision* of mysteries remains therefore a vision of *mysteries*, of realities which continue to elude even the innermost modalities of sensation and which cannot be adequately conveyed by any language. I might add that the Eastern Christian tradition regularly uses the term *myster-*

ies to refer to its sacraments, especially the Eucharist. We are thus reminded that the spiritual ladder must be firmly positioned on a living faith before we even consider ascending it.

Whatever it is that one noetically envisions, the Hesychasts are unanimous about its being bathed in an extraordinary *light*. Indeed, the doctrine of the uncreated light is characteristic of their teaching. Once again we are using more than a metaphor. It is said that the light in question is objectively real, its model being the light of Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor, when "His face *shone as the sun*, and his raiment was *white as the light*" (Matt. 17:2). Being born from one's vision *ineffably*, this dazzling darkness eclipses all description. And yet it is truly present, suffusing creation with the radiance of God, a sort of visible band in the spectrum of His *holy energy*. Intimately tied to our transformed perception of this light all about us, says our poet, there will come next a corresponding and complementary *illumination* within. *Beyond all telling*, this ninth step of the ladder admits man to a degree of Divine participation where he himself begins to shine with Christ's glory. True to the maxim that like can be known only by like, the Hesychast strives by grace toward the moment when the body, now thoroughly steeped in God, bears witness in its own substance to the realities it has seen. The iconographical tradition of the halo or nimbus is no pious extravagance. Had we the eyes to see, we would realize that the true saint shines like the heaven he is.

And yet heaven is not enough. Heaven is a prison for the Sufi, say the mystics of Islam, for who wants the garden when there is also the Gardener? "Theophanis" agrees. There is more than illumination in the spiritual journey. We are not to rest satisfied with a contemplation of the splendor of God, nor with an appreciative spectator's place in the Divine proximity, however joyful and permanent. A tenth step remains: a coinherence or union with the Supreme Reality itself. For as the Hesychast sees it, the only truly *endless* perfection is the *perfection* of what is intrinsically endless or infinite, namely, God. It is therefore into this Infinite that human nature will eventually be drawn at the very top of the ladder. Like God Himself, the top rung has *no limit*, even though its description may be *compassed in a single line*. The end of the way is in fact the beginning of an immeasurable advance into the Love that loves Love and in Love all things. Those of my readers who are familiar with Eastern Christian theology will recognize this as the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis* or deification, classically summed up in the Patristic formula "God became man that man might become God". Salvation is not just the restoration of an Edenic *status quo*. It is an unprecedented and *unheard-of life*, no longer restricted by the qualities and conditions of created existence in *this present world*. A reversion has taken place along the path of creation, a voluntary return of what we are into God. Two distinct circles remain, the human and the Divine, but their center is now the same.

I turn now as promised to a few, even briefer, comments on the remaining parts of the poem. The most important question the reader should be asking himself at this juncture is why there is a remainder at all. After scaling the summit of deification, the succeeding lines may seem tedious and anticlimactic. What is the author's point? Why not stop, as he easily might have, with the highly charged first half of his efforts? Why all the imploration, admonition, and self-reproach of his conclusion?

To answer these questions, we need to consider a common feature of all Hesychast writing, common in fact to the Christian East as a whole, and that is its preference for the mystical way of negation. It is sometimes said that there are two distinct spiritual paths: the cataphatic way or way of affirmation and the apophatic way or way of negation. In the former, which is somewhat more typical of western theology, one approaches God by affirming His goodness in good things, His beauty in things that are beautiful, and His truth in all truths. God is the highest or greatest of beings, to whom creatures point through their positive qualities. In the negative way, by contrast, one approaches God by prescinding from all qualities or attributes, by denying that the Supreme Reality has anything whatsoever in common with this world. God is not created or finite, of course. Every theologian knows that. But neither is He even good with the goodness we know, nor wise in terms of earthly wisdom, nor indeed does He even exist by our measures. He is not the highest or

greatest of beings, but superessentially beyond even being itself.

We have seen evidence of this apophaticism in the first part of "The Ladder". The vision is a vision of *mysteries*, the Divine light is *unheard-of*, and the heart's illumination is *beyond all telling*. In short, *experience alone can teach these things, not talk*. All language is reduced to stammering and silence when confronted by the experience of God. But the same thing is true of all our experiences. Which words are really sufficient for a rose or a friendship? Perception on every level of being is always more than the concepts describing it.

"Theophanis" is therefore obliged to go further, extending the range of negation and deepening its intensity. *Do not deceive yourself*, he continues. The full force of his imperative will not be felt unless we have first admitted that our entire waking life is a web of delusion and vanity. Recall what I said earlier on the subject of *thoughts*. Try to attend to one thing alone, and we soon discover that our days are but daydreams. Whatever contact we may hope to have with absolute Truth will come only at the expense of all those *idle hopes* aroused by our present, passion-laden experience. This does not mean that we should despair of making any progress toward God, believing ourselves condemned to a sort of total depravity. The apophatic path is still a path, and the poet is quick in counseling us to make every effort to find the Truth *in this present world*. It should be understood, however, that this last phrase is adverbial, not adjectival; it modifies man's endeavors toward finding, not the Truth found. For

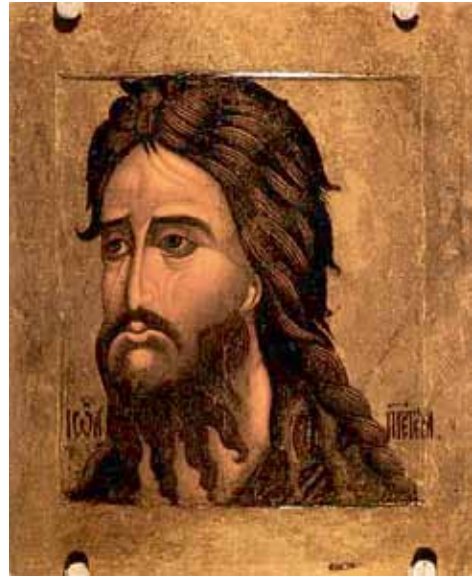


the Supreme Reality is beyond even more than our personal experience. It transcends the entire cosmic order. What we shall *find* when we find it is *a wealth the world cannot contain*. The author means what he says: if you wish to enter God, you must *detach yourself from everything*.

Understanding this stress on negation should help considerably when it comes to making sense of the concluding parts of "The Ladder". The poet's vivid expressions of unworthiness may at first seem excessive. We are told that "Theophanis" is *indolent, hard of heart, and void of all these graces*; that he is presumptuous in having *dared* to write on so sublime a subject and is therefore deserving of the fate of the Biblical *Uzzah*, who was killed for touching the *ark of God* (2 Sam. 6:6-7); and finally that he is worthy only of words that *condemn himself*, an example of *utter fruitlessness*. Surely, one feels, this very eloquent monk cannot have been quite such a villain! And then, making

matters perhaps even more indigestible, there are the threats of *boundless panic*. A *note of terror* is sounded by the author's *fearful warnings*, which he deliberately intends to *strike us harshly* and to *inspire our dread*. What is going on here? Is this pious sentimentality? Is the author following some ancient stylistic precedent? Is he just trying to scare us?

Our answer in each case must be no. One must admit that the poem could be read this way and that it is easy to be put off by its seeming platitudes and fire-and-brimstone exhortations. Such a reading, however, would be quite mistaken. A man who understands so precisely the *pure science of prayer*, who is subtle enough to distinguish between *illumination* and *light*, and who from his own wrestling with *thoughts* can speak so powerfully about the limits of language is surely aware of what we ourselves can see so clearly. We all know from our own not-so-subtle experience that *terror* and *panic* are emotions belonging to the hardened, not the liquefied, *heart*. They are measures of the ego's continuing eccentricity in relation to God, the result of its congenital complicity in a world that will finally disappoint every one of us. In Hesychast terms, such passions are simply more *thoughts*, more psychic chatter. "Theophanis" cannot possibly be construed as encouraging them. Nor can he have failed to see that insofar as someone recognizes his *fruitlessness*, he cannot be *utterly* fruitless. The poet is well aware that the ego has a way of feeding even on abjection and self-condemnation, of being proud of



its sin. When he refers to himself as *the first* among those *who are hard of heart*, it would therefore be absurd to imagine that he expects us to think we are his rightful superiors.

Only the negative way can make sense of these puzzling expressions; both the self-reproaches and the warnings require transposing into an apophatic key. It is helpful to recall the anonymity of the poet. The compilers of *The Philokalia* have recorded a name, or at least a pen name, but that is all. In reading the "Ladder", we are not listening to a particular individual whose biography might be used in checking the accuracy of his judgments. We are listening to a voice which the accidents of history have now rendered impersonal, according perhaps to its own design: the voice, as I proposed earlier, of the spiritual search itself, the inward cry of every man's longing for God. I suggested that the author's name should be seen as a symbol, and I can now

be more precise about that symbol's significance. "Theophanis the Monk" is not such and such an ego. He is the ego as such—the principle of limitation, individuation, and self-forgetfulness in each of us.

With this in mind, his estimate of himself becomes perfectly intelligible. He is indeed *void of all graces*, not just in fact but in principle. For measured against the Supreme Reality at the top of the ladder, the ego is even less than unworthy; it is a virtual void, a centrifugal tendency toward the "outer darkness" (Matt. 8:12) of destruction and the root of blind and *fruitless* craving, and its mortification is essential to our seeing that God is the only true center. Competition with the Divine is never more than illusion.

The promises of *terror* and the *fearful warnings* can be interpreted along similar lines. I have singled out the words *terror* and *panic* as signs of a purely emotional and ego-centric attachment. But suppose we read them instead in conjunction with two of the poem's other terms: *fear* and *dread*. Fear is often just a passion itself, of course, a feeling of malaise, consternation, or anxiety, and as such it too must be excluded from the soul of the man who is seeking *peace from thoughts*. But in an older and deeper sense, *fear* signifies awe. Rather than a subjective and blood-freezing fright, it points us toward an objective and liberating wonder. No mere reactive emotion, this kind of fear is a real organ for perception and participation in God. Let us not expunge the common sense meaning of the poet's words. Doubtless there

will come a day of sheer panic for those who in this life did *not ponder always on these things* and did not by a serious spiritual effort grow accustomed to the daily death of desire. But for those who did, the holy *fear* of awe will be among the *blessings promised*. Far from something they might wish to escape, the exquisite joy of *dread* will be offered as one of the rewards of their way, a delicious *fruit of all the books*.

The true seeker knows from repeated *experience* that the negation of a negation is something wondrously positive. "Theophanis" is not trying to frighten us or force our submission to a sectarian ideology. On the contrary, with a precise and carefully selected dialectical language, he is simply describing what makes it possible to climb the ladder: the negations are nothing but the spaces between the rungs. And he is showing us, from the point of view of the ego he "is", what must inevitably happen as one moves through these spaces: how the many layers of ambition and cowardice and resentment and greed and smugness and torpor are each in turn stripped away and the naked soul is ushered, beyond all possibility, into the *heart* of the living God.

May each of us be granted the grace and the strength so to climb.



Prayer Made the Difference: Reflections on the Power of Prayer in African Christianity

by Akintunde E. Akinade

Africa is currently boiling with religious ferment and has, indeed, become a theological laboratory, dealing with is-

sues--- literally--- of life and death, of deformation and reformation, of fossilization and revival.

Ogbu U. Kalu¹

Introduction: The Dynamics of Faith

The historical development and appropriation of the Christian faith in Africa appears in a variety of interrelated processes: missions, conversions, ecclesiastical autonomy, charismatic renewals, and engagement with public life. In the twenty first century, African Christianity continues to garner creative paradigms in the experience and expressions of faith. In terms of growth, African Christianity commands a robust record. By the year 2025, it is estimated that the number of Christians in Africa will reach around 633 million. This fact presents a compelling opportunity for scholars to continue to probe the protean and dynamic expressions of African Christianity in all its various incarnations. African Christianity has indeed come of age. Nevertheless, the future of Christianity in Africa goes beyond counting numbers and glorified statistics. It seems to me that in terms of transformation of faith and practice, a constant *aggiornamento* (orientation to the present) is necessary and imperative within African Christianity. In creating the room for renewal and self-criticism, the Christian faith can respond to the signs of the times within the African continent and also become more prophetic and relevant. In the absence of critical self-assessment, faith becomes hollow and a mumbo-jumbo of abstract doctrines.

The thrust of this paper is to reflect on the power and agency of prayer in African Christianity, especially in the Pentecostal and charismatic religious traditions. It is not a foray into the

labyrinth of theological abstractions. Rather, it is a reflection on prayer as one of the primary “spiritual exercises” of African Christians within several religious movements. Unencumbered by the strains of Western theological orthodoxy and the pangs of enlightenment ethos, Africans understand prayer as the solemn stirrings of the soul that are borne out of deep religious convictions. This paper seeks to go beyond the apathy, cynicism, and cultural menagerie that have characterized certain discourse on African spirituality. This attitude may be a carry over from the jaundiced perspectives on African traditional religious traditions. Western literature is rife with disparaging comments and reviews on African indigenous culture and religion. The late E.B. Idowu “catalogued the inappropriate terms used in western literatures of various genres to the extent that a reviewer accused him of quarrelling with dead men.”² The reductionist tendencies to label viable spiritual experiences of African people as superstition, emotional, and escapist only gloss over the creative spiritual impulses within African Christianity today. Such perspective may lead to a crass materialistic understanding of profound religious convictions and experience. The rationalist and bourgeois perspectives of modern analysts may also lead to superficial and naïve conclusions about the theological paradigms in African Pentecostalism. A phenomenological approach will help to clarify the religious experience and expressions of African Christians as they seek to understand the mysteries of the sacred. The discourse on prayer

is located in the intersection of actuality and possibility or what we can identify as the quintessential crossroad of hope and promise, human brokenness and redemption. This juxtaposition indicates the perennial paradoxical nature of the Christian faith. This perspective is well grounded in the African worldview and it provides a glimpse of the constant yearnings of the human soul. In his book, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, Gerardus van der Leeuw, a prominent phenomenologist of religion defined "the soul as the locus of the sacred in the human."³ Prayer deals with the matters of the soul. In the words of van der Leeuw:

This soul then, as one whole, is connected with some specific "stuff." It is not restricted to any single portion of the body, but extends itself over all its parts according as these show themselves capable of some kind of powerfulness, just as blood is distributed throughout the whole body although certain organs are richer in blood than others.... for the "soul" designates not life and nothing more, and still less consciousness, but whatever is replete with power and effectiveness. It implies that there is a "life" which is more than merely being alive....⁴

Van der Leeuw describes the power of the soul as "soul-stuff." He connects this dimension to the essential aspect of being human. Prayer then signifies the solemn or passionate verbalization of the yearnings of the soul. It may also be a quiet and meditative opening of the contents of the soul to the "ground of being" to borrow a phrase from Paul Tillich. Prayer is at the core of any re-

ligious experience, disposition, and attitude. It is the unequivocal and unfettered acknowledgement that human beings are absolutely dependent upon an Ultimate Reality that transcends our limited verbal descriptions and theological analysis.⁵ Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* describes prayer as "the chief exercise of faith."⁶ Prayer constitutes an orientation and a significant way of being in the world. Through prayer, a veritable religious community emerges. Faith is reinforced through a life of prayer and constant communion with God. The communal aspect of this dimension constitutes the *raison d'être* of the church as the "body of Christ." This image signifies the mutual dependence of all the members of the church community on one another. Members have different spiritual gifts that are for the enrichment of the entire community. The nurturing aspect of this community is also very significant. The Christian doctrine of election is not just about personal salvation, but deals with the creation of God's people. In the words of Daniel Migliore, "the doctrine of election is not intended to cater to excessive self-concern but precisely to open us to the blessings and responsibilities of life in community."⁷ The practice of prayer is about communion with God, other people, and all of God's creation.

Creativity and Transformation in African Christianity

This paper inevitably grapples with the transmission and transformation of the Christian faith in Africa. The practice

and expression of prayer within African Christianity underscores how Africans have appropriated the good news within various contexts and circumstances. This paper argues that the understanding of prayer in African Christianity calls for a holistic perspective. I contend that such perspective on faith and prayer resonates with the African understanding of the cosmos and reality. Since the practice of piety and faith cannot be done *in vacuo*, African Christians naturally have used their cultural sensibilities to re-interpret the Christian message to fit into their context and worldview. The appropriation of Christianity in Africa provides a good lens for understanding how the Gospel becomes the African story. In the transmission and transformation of Christianity in Africa, Africans were not passive observers; rather they played an active role in shaping the history and experience of the Christian faith in Africa. In fact, most of the theological formulations that have emerged within various contexts in Africa bear the unique stamp of Africa's cultural, social, economic, and political realities. There is nothing strange about this contextual phenomenon; after all, the incarnation was the story of the Savior of all people, of all nations, and of all circumstances.

A pragmatic approach to religious faith demands that it must be woven into the real life experiences of people. In this instance, the receiver of the Christian message is not a passive observer, rather he or she creates new patterns of religious meaning that are concrete and real. The standard of appropriation becomes the essential fac-

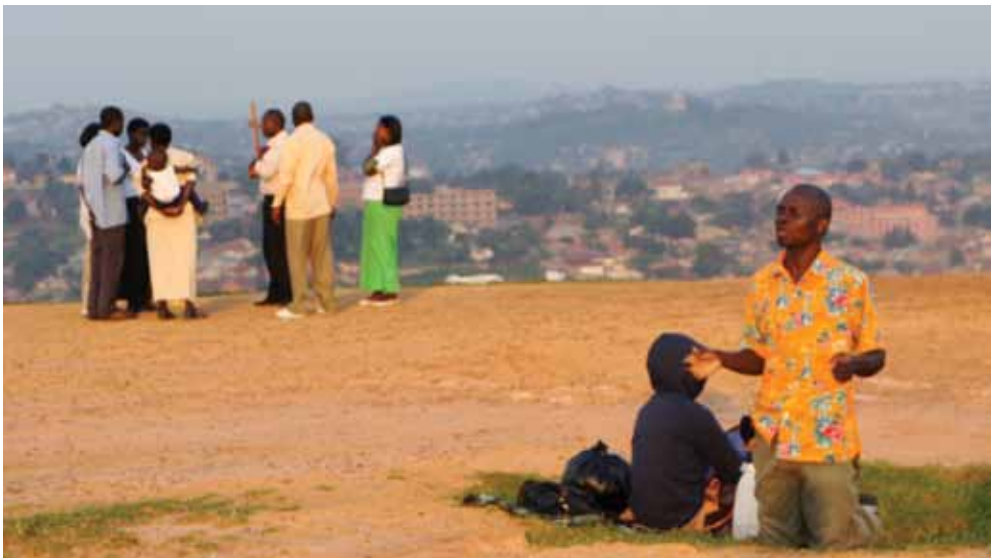
tor that allows the Gospel to become alive and relevant in different cultures. This process valorizes the activities and experiences of Africans as active decoders and shapers of the Christian message. African charismatic prophets such as William Wade Harris, Garrick Braide, Simon Kimbangu, and Isaiah Shembe established religious movements that tapped the creativity of African worldview and sensibilities. They also incorporated various aspects of African culture in liturgy, doctrine, and theology. This was the first phase in Africa's religious independence. The spirit of intense indigenization was already in the air. The juggernaut of indigenous fervor mobilized many African prophets to seek more religious autonomy in the early part of the twentieth century. In this season of spiritual renewal and revitalization, African prophets laid the foundation that resulted in the meteoric rise of Pentecostal churches in post-colonial Africa. The second phase was characterized by the emergence of charismatic churches such as the Aladura (literally meaning those who pray) in West Africa or the Zionist movements in South Africa. These churches fall under the rubric of African Independent Churches or African Instituted Churches (AICs). The Aladura church movement that emerged in south-western Nigeria in the later part of the twentieth century was an authentic African response to the criticism that the Church within the African continent was a veritable marionette with its strings in the hands of some foreign overlords.⁸ Aladura churches were in effect responding to the verbal and cerebral form of Western

Christianity, which is often out of touch with people's concerns and experience. The rise of African Pentecostalism represents the third phase in the creative efforts by Africans in establishing their own church movements. Some of the dynamic movements that arose in the twentieth century include: William F. Kumuyi's Deeper Christian Life Ministry in Nigeria, Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church in Ghana, Enoch Adejare Adeboye's Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Nigeria, and Andrew Wutamashe's Family of God in Zimbabwe. The emergence of Charismatic and Pentecostal churches in Africa underscores the prodigious initiatives of local agents and pioneers in mission and evangelism. Indigenizing the Christian faith also entailed the project of de-colonizing theology. These renewal movements have developed new insights into theological doctrines and experience. They also provide new perspectives on practices

such as prayer, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, prophecy, healing, and political theology.

The transformation of Christianity in Africa is intimately connected with the understanding that the Christian message has a direct bearing and connection to their existential condition. Paul Tillich's method of correlation speaks to the essential task of connecting the existential questions of human existence with theology, philosophy, and ontology. According to him:

The Christian message provides the answers to the questions implied in human existence. These answers are contained in the revelatory events on which Christianity is based and are taken by systematic theology from the sources, through the medium, under norm. Their content cannot be derived from questions that would come from an analysis of human existence. They are 'spoken' to human existence from beyond it, in a sense. Otherwise, they



would not be answers, for the question is human existence itself.⁹

Through indigenous agency and appropriation, Africans have claimed Christianity as their own and put their own unique stamp of understanding on the contents of the Christian faith. David Barrett predicted that based on demographic projections that by the end of the twentieth century, Africa may “tip the balance and transform Christianity permanently into a primarily non-Western religion.”¹⁰ Barrett’s prediction is already coming to pass. In the twenty first century, African Christianity is a success story. The late Kwame Bediako has described Christian Africa as “the surprise factor in the modern missionary story.”¹¹ In post-colonial Africa, Christianity is experiencing an unprecedented bottom-up shakedown that continues to surprise skeptics and secular pundits.

Prayer, Piety, and Power

The exercise of prayer in African Christianity has direct connections and linkages with the understanding of the various manifestations and levels of power.¹² The paradox of African reality is very blatant and perplexing. The ferment of religious passion fills the air with hope and anticipation, the landscape is dotted with prayer sites, and zealous Christians anxiously take shelter under the sacred canopy. Prayer camps, vigils, redemptions nights, Holy Ghost revivals, and prayer warrior groups are ubiquitous phenomena in post-colonial Africa. Nevertheless, the overall conditions for individuals are ap-

palling. The landscape is rife with social malaise, agony, and contempt for people wielding political power. The most religious people are the most powerless and the least empowered. The predatory state also acts as a malevolent force that stifles and suffocates people every day. Prayer becomes the weapon to unmask, resist, and fight the principalities and powers of the world. The egalitarian aspect of prayer deals with the fact that it is available for everyone. It is not an exclusive spiritual virtue. It is for the poor, the rich, the sinful, the righteous, weak, and strong.¹³

In the midst of pandemonium and pain, prayer becomes a powerful protest against all the negative forces that put people in bondage. African Christians have an acute awareness of the principalities and powers of the world that create debilitating forces in the lives of people. In Pentecostal theology, the language of radical warfare is deployed to combat these evil and demonic forces. In the call to prayer for Nigeria, Pastor M.O. Ojewale declared:

The warfare we are presently engaged in is the battle of translating the victory of Jesus over the devil into the everyday, natural realities of our personal lives and also of our political, religious, economic and social systems. It is a battle of reclamation: to reclaim from the devil what he illegally holds in his control.... It is warfare. But we are on the winning side. This is the time to muster the army—the Lord’s army. Here is a clarion call to battle....

Prayer—militant, strategic and aggressive prayer—must be our weapon of warfare at this time. It is a spiritual warfare and it needs spiritual

weapons. This is a call into the ring to wrestle, to sweat it out with an unseen opponent. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness, against invisible powers in high places (Ephesians 6:12).

The Christian Gospel is replete with resources for spiritual warfare. The essence of the good news that was proclaimed by Jesus is that the hope for God's redemptive reign has already begun. God's reign in which God's people would be made physically and spiritually whole has already taken place. Prayer provides the capacity to wage a titanic battle against all forms of evil and demonic forces. In the words of Pastor Enoch Adeboye, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of Christ (RCCG) "Power propelled by holiness will ensure complete deliverance to God's people. Complete deliverance means freedom from all enemies internal and external, known and unknown."¹⁴ The ministry of Jesus consists of a strong repudiation of the forces of death and alienation that prevent people from experiencing wholeness. Jesus proclaimed a prophetic message of abundant life for his followers. His exorcisms underscore his divine commission to wage war against the forces that bind and limit people. Liberation theologians from all over the globe have affirmed that there is a compelling power within Christianity to resist and repel the oppressive forces of the world.

Prayer as Limitless Language

Johann Baptist Metz's understanding of prayer as limitless language finds deep resonance in the practices of prayer in

African Christianity. Prayer deals with calling on God with confidence and with joy. It is a way to praise God in gratitude and thanksgiving. Whether standing up, bowing down, or on bended knees, Christians acknowledge their infinite indebtedness to God for God's grace, mercy, and love. However, in the face of horrendous evil and calamity, prayer can be a way of crying out to God or even crying out against God. In the language that may be epitomized by "why Lord," we are confronted with litanies and testimonies of people calling out to God in the midst of pain and terror. It is not an exaggeration to say that the reign of poverty bestrides the African continent like a raging colossus. Oppressive political powers pour ashes on people's face with reckless abandon. The quest for liberation and the yearning to breathe free are ubiquitous. Out of acute conviction and knowledge of God as the ultimate source of liberation and redemption, they call on God for help and deliverance. Ann and Barry Ulanov's contention that prayer is "primary speech"¹⁵ may provide the heuristic tool for understanding that people's conversations with God has infinite dimensions and possibilities. If we also understand this speech as a "gut-level" response to the divine, then it becomes imperative for people to relate this speech to their overall existential context and experience. I hasten to say that this "correlation" is out of a deep religious conviction that is sustained by prayer and faith. Prayer as constant conversations with God reflect the existential trappings and conditions of everyday experience. It is

not an abstract engagement or exercise that takes people out of this world. It is fully entrenched in who we are. It elicits people's fears, desires, anxieties, joys, and frustrations.

Meeting Place of Heaven and Earth: Prayer in Aladura Spirituality

The spiritual awakening and revival that swept across Southwestern Nigeria in the later part of the twentieth century led to the emergence of indigenous churches collectively labeled as Aladura churches. These churches comprised of the Church of the Lord, the Celestial Church of Christ, the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, and the Christ Apostolic Church. In contrast to previous secessionist churches such as African Baptist Church, United Native African Church, and the United African Methodist Church, Aladura churches added to religious independence a comprehensive program of liturgical innovation and inculturation. Prayer is at the core of Aladura theology, doctrines, worship, and rituals. This central belief is consistently exemplified in the life and teachings of the founders of these churches. According to Emmanuel Adejobi, the late Primate of the Church of the Lord,

It (prayer) is an act of praise and worship. It is the resort of the soul, a revitalization of spiritual strength.... Yea, it is a meeting place with God where the creature talks with the Creator, and communes as a friend to a friend.... Where all wants and poverty are laid bare for Divine abundance and bless-

ing. It is the meeting place of heaven and earth. It is a place where the forces of darkness are put to flight and Satan's power disarmed. There the Christian perceives heavenly visions.... Prayer is the mighty power house of the believer.¹⁶

Adejobi identified prayer as an intentional action that creates a special relationship (friendship) with God. This relationship provides the power to overcome evil and all the machinations of demonic forces in the world. This divine power is the bedrock of human wholeness and wellbeing. Benjamin Ray alludes to a popular Aladura story that compares a person who prays diligently to a child who cries out at night to its mother. In a rhetorical overture, the Aladuras ask: "would a mother refuse to respond to her child?" In concluding this story, Benjamin Ray states, "as a mother always responds to her child, so God responds to his children's prayers. If the prayer is performed properly and if faith is strong and free of sin, God will answer. Such is the quality of Aladura faith."¹⁷

In Aladura spirituality and practice, prayer is the open line to God. It provides the opportunity to have an intimate relationship with God. This relationship also brings joy, peace, and the power over the forces of evil in the world. In the words of Bolaji Idowu, "they (the Aladura churches) claim that their prayers are efficacious for every eventuality.... A person who goes to them receives a diagnosis of his trouble as well as the necessary prescription of what to do in a concrete, dramatic way, to be 'saved'"¹⁸ Aladura churches



strongly believe that prayer is the master key that opens the door of divine possibilities and promises. It is an invitation to have an enduring friendship with God. This profound relationship is sustained by faith and the abiding grace of God.

Prayers bring both material and spiritual benefits. In responding to the African traditional worldview that recognizes the debilitating effects of evil unleashed by demonic spirits, Aladura churches believe that constant prayer is the most powerful force against witchcraft, sickness, professional failure, childlessness, and untimely death. Prayer provides holistic healing and robust deliverance. A popular song in the Celestial Church of Christ gallantly declares:

I'm freed from the Evil World
I'm freed from confusion
We're freed from all witches
We're freed from all wizards
We're freed from all sorcerers
We have conquered witches
We have overcome
We have conquered witches
We have overcome
Witches have no power over Celestials¹⁹

The Celestial Church of Christ call their church building a "Home of Prayer," where a deep sense of *koinonia* exists. It is also a context where God becomes immanent and many spiritual forces are available for the members of the church. Aladura churches valorize spiritual practices that are meant to help its members experience communal wellbeing and healing. Theological reflections and practices fit into the daily

practices and everyday experience of its members. In essence, the means of spiritual communication within Aladura churches "are not statements but stories, not theological arguments but testimonies, not definitions but participatory dance, not concepts but banquets, not systematic arguments but songs, not hermeneutical analysis but healing."²⁰

Most prayers in Aladura churches are *ex tempore* and are made with remarkable gusto and gaiety. The effectiveness of prayer is reinforced by the use of Psalms and other symbolic objects like candles, perfumes, incense, and Holy water. Aladura churches are concerned with this-worldly/proximate salvation and matters germane to the total well being of human beings. Harold Turner has correctly observed that Aladura churches are not so much concerned with correct doctrines as they are with "power to deal with the practical problems of daily living--- security, good relations with others, prosperity, success, and especially the problems of fertility for women and health for all."²¹

Fire from Heaven: the Power of the Holy Spirit

African Pentecostal and charismatic churches affirm the vibrancy and efficacy of the Holy Spirit as the basis of their congregational wholeness and well-being. The Spirit is experienced and articulated as a cosmological reality for worship, social engagement, prayer, healing, glossolalia, and mission. The Spirit is a life-enabling power and a

compelling force for discovering God in new places and for multiple functions. The flow of the Spirit is ubiquitous. This idea is a radical protest against a static understanding of the spirit in many historic churches all over Africa. Pentecostals believe that for spirituality to be authentic and relevant, it must connect with all of life and the Spirit of the Lord must empower all aspects of human life. For them, the Spirit is the veritable fire from heaven that consumes all the machinations of the devil and all malevolent spiritual forces.

The concept of Spirit in the belief system of African Christians is inextricably connected with the concept of power. This is the “enabling power” which gives people control over a situation that is beyond human capacity. Power is essential to the relationship between the human and the sacred. Africans have traditionally cherished the idea of a Spirit world with which humans can communicate. African Christians, “being inheritors of a spiritual tradition at whose heart lies the idea of an intrinsic connection between the visible and invisible, have brought this approach to bear on Christianity.”²² This is one of the creative dimensions in the inculturation of the Christian faith in Africa. One paramount concern in African Pentecostal and Charismatic churches is how to obtain, retain, and use spiritual power. According to Harold Turner, “spiritual power is the inspiration by the Holy Spirit through spiritual power over spiritual enemies.”²³ The anointing of the Holy Spirit gives the power to overcome all the forces of darkness that contradict and contravene all the

qualities of an abundant life. This is a radical pneumatology that empowers people to be the true children of God. The transformation that this process entails becomes visible and palpable in the daily activities of the people of God. The anointing of the Holy Spirit is neither elitist nor esoteric. Rather, it is available to everyone who can humbly ask for it through prayer.

Conclusion: the Triumph of Hope

The understanding and exercise of prayer in African Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions underscore the transformative power of prayer. Prayer sustains and empowers. It provides the unalloyed access to the empowering qualities of the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the words of Ogbu Kalu:

The ordinary Pentecostal in Africa is less concerned with modernization and globalization and more about a renewed relationship with God, intimacy with the transcendental empowerment by the Holy Spirit, and protection by the power in the blood of Jesus as the person struggles to eke out a viable life in a hostile environment.²⁴

This perspective is a bold affirmation that prayer is a personal or collective communication with God who is the source of hope, authentic living, and liberation. African Christians understand that God is not something, but someone. God is not an autocratic leader who rules with a despotic fiat. Prayer is a testimony to God’s abundant goodness and mercy. The differ-

ent understandings of prayer within the African context confirm God as the source of hope and grace. This is about the costly grace granted at the Cross. It is a grace that celebrates the dignity of human beings in the midst of pain and anxieties. The creative impulse of African Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations deal with how they continue to maintain the delicate bal-

ance between a futuristic eschatological hope and a concrete hope that is only vouchsafed in the daily experience of people. The infinite potentials and possibilities are reinforced through the habit of praying without ceasing and the unequivocal affirmation of God as the "all in all"(1 Cor. 15:28).



NOTES

1. Ogbu U. Kalu, "African Traditional Religion and Its Modern Fate," in *The World's Religions: Continuities and Transformations*, eds. Peter B. Clarke and Peter Beyer (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 11-12.
2. See Ogbu U. Kalu, "Introduction: The Shape and Flow of African Church Historiography," in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc. 2007), 6.
3. Gerardus van der Leeuw quoted in Charles H. Long, "Passage and Prayer: The Origin of Religion in the Atlantic," in *The Courage to Hope: From Black Suffering to Human Redemption*, eds. Quinton Hosford Dixie and Cornel West (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 11.
4. *Ibid*, 12.
5. In the Jewish mystical tradition, God is *Ein Sof*, or Infinity. This concept is used to capture God's absolute transcendence. In the words of Neil Gillman, "God is the utter beyond--- beyond anything that we can experience, know, and describe in human language. That's precisely what makes God God, and that's the difference between any object in the created world and God." See his book, *The Way of Encountering God in Judaism* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), 4. This perspective also finds resonance in the works of the great Jewish philosopher, Maimonides (1135-1204).
6. See Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 179.
7. *Ibid*, 77.
8. It is not appropriate to put the stamp of syncretism on Aladura churches. They vigorously reject any element of traditional religious beliefs and practice which they view as evil and opposed to the Christian faith.
9. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 64.
10. David Barrett, "AD2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa," in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 59, January 1970, 50.
11. Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 4.
12. Walter Wink's trilogy, *Unmasking the Powers* is a very helpful treatise on the understanding of the language of power in the New Testament as well as in extra-canonical literature. Wink also provides an excellent analysis of how to discern and transform the powers in the post-modern world.
13. It is very interesting to note that when the die is cast, political leaders in Africa turn to prayer for political legitimization or guidance. In a well-calculated political overture during the national elections April 2011, the Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan knelt down before Pastor Enoch Adeboye at the Holy Ghost Congress and confessed, "I am here tonight to submit myself to you and God for prayers... therefore, pray for me not to drift from His fear." President John Attah Mills also visits T.B. Joshua's Synagogue Church of all Nations in Nigeria for prayer. Other African leaders that have visited this church for prayer include President Omar Bongo of the Republic of Gabon, Goodwill Zwelithini, King of the Zulu from South Africa, ex-President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia, Andre Kolimba, former President of the Central African Republic, and ex-President Pascal Linssouba of Congo Brazaville.
14. Pastor Enoch Adejare, quoted in Asonzeh Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008), 264.
15. See Ann and Barry Ulanov, *Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982).
16. S.A. Adejobi, *The Observances and Practices of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Light of Old Testament and New Testament* (Ibadan: n.d.), 12.

17. Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 190.
18. E. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 46.
19. Ibid.
20. This statement is part of Walter Hollenwager's forward to John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, *African Initiatives Christianity*, p. ix.
21. Harold Turner, "Religious Movements in Primal (or Tribal) Societies," *Mission Focus*, 9, 1981, 50
22. See Gerrie ter Harr, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Great Britain: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), p. 52.
23. H.W. Turner, *African Independent Church Vol. II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 317.
24. Ogbu Kalu, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Reshaping of the African Religious Landscape in the 1990s," *Mission Studies*, 20, 1-39, 2003, 88.



Language and Prayer within Judaism, Christianity and Islam

by Ori Z Soltes

Let us start at the beginning. The term “religion” derives from the Latin root, *lig-*, meaning “bind,” sandwiched between a suffix (*-io*) that shapes that root into a noun and a prefix, *re-*, that means “back” or “again.”¹ So religion’s purpose is to bind us back or bind us again—to what? To that which we humans, across our geography and history, believe has made us. History is overrun with a range of types of *religiones*. There are those—for example among the Latin-speaking ancient Romans themselves, or among their neighbors, such as the Greeks or the Egyptians—that posit the existence of a large number of diverse divinities. There are those, such as Zoroastrianism, that posit a fundamental duality—Ahura Mazda as a supreme and supremely good Being yet whose creative power is challenged by Ahriman as the personification of destructiveness. There are Monotheistic faiths, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam that claim common roots in the spiritual tradition begun with Abraham and offer diverse branches not only among them but within each of them.²

What all of these traditions (and others) share in common is the conviction that human existence is the result of powers (or a power) beyond ourselves and that human survival is in large part dependent upon our ability to understand what divinity is and what it would have us be. If divinity made us, it can also destroy us; it can harm or help us, further or hinder us, bless or curse us. Religion seeks to bind us back to divinity so that we can come to some sort of answer to these basic questions of understanding, to address divinity so

that we fulfill its will and so that it retains some sense of our needs.

How do we accomplish this? All of these traditions have the identical answering starting point: revelation. They share the notion that divinity communicates itself to and through particular individuals in particular times and places and offers instruction regarding both what it is and what and how it would have us be. They also share a complication: at some point the individuals chosen by divinity to serve as revelatory conduits are no longer among us. At that point each tradition becomes dominated by interpretation. Assuming that post-prophetic leaders agree regarding what a given prophet has *said* while he functioned as a conduit through which divinity speaks, there may not be consensus as to what the words spoken by that prophet *mean*.

Thus a given tradition may endure schism. So for example, the Hebrew-Israelite-Judaeen tradition eventually divided into Judaism and Christianity. In that schism we recognize the double interpretive challenge with respect to revelation. Jews and Christians share the same revelation, in part, but understand and interpret it differently—which is why Jews call it the Hebrew Bible and Christians call it the Old Testament—as they disagree, in part, with regard to what constitutes the ultimate revelation. Thus for Jews the Hebrew Bible is the entirety of God’s words to us, while for Christians that same text is a prelude to the ultimate words found in the New Testament.³ Later on, Islam will arrive on the scene and regard parts of both of these texts as revealed

but will consider them to have been corrupted, to be superseded by a more up-to-date, more perfect revelation through the Prophet Muhammad—which revelation is called the Qur'an.

What all of these revealed texts have in common with each other is that they are *texts*, made up of *words*. One of the most fundamental and inherent complications that they all offer is that of articulating how God communicates to and through prophets in words, and how we can address—how we can bind ourselves back—to God with words. All religious traditions make use of other instruments beyond words in grappling with divinity. The earliest forms of visual art are part of the instrumentation of addressing divinity.⁴ We can infer the same regarding music and dance. For all these media transcend the words that, marking our species as unique, and distinguishing us from other species, both extend us and yet—another paradox, perhaps—limit us.

Our verbal descriptive powers are limited within our *own* realm of experience. How can we possibly hope to address and describe God with any sort of adequacy, when God is infinitely *beyond* our experience? Thus everything we say about God is a kind of metaphor. “All-powerful,” “all-knowing,” “all-good,” “all-merciful”—these are all terms and concepts derived from our own experience and our own understanding of what such terms and concepts mean. Can we know what they “mean” to God? When we speak of God as creating and destroying, harming or helping—or when we ascribe to God any sorts of feelings, intentions,

actions—do we not do so from our own, human perspective?

Thus words, as a primary human instrument of engaging divinity, are fraught with complication and paradox. And the words we use in this process may be typically grouped into three modes. There is the mode through which we attempt to *describe* what and how God is. There is the mode through which we try to *understand* what God would have us *be*. Both of these modes, as we have noted, are typically shaped into the revelations that, when they are part of our belief system, we regard as real, and if they are part of someone else's belief system in which we do not believe, we regard as mythical. Thus for believing Jews and Christians the account of creation offered in Genesis is real, whereas the account offered by the Greek poet, Hesiod, in his *Theogony*, is called myth.⁵

The third mode of word-based instrumentation for grappling with divinity is what we put to use in *addressing* God. Reflecting our need to *bind* ourselves *back* to divinity, and our desire for a positive relationship with divinity, this mode is called *prayer*. We find it across human history as a varied phenomenon. It may pertain to an individual or to a community; it may be offered according to a set formula or according to the formula of the moment and the need that it addresses at that moment.

Each of the three Abrahamic traditions offers its own particularities with respect to requisites for effective prayer, in accordance with its sense of what is most essential if one is to bind one's self successfully back to God through

this medium. Those requisites include both potential times and contents of prayer. Thus for instance, Islam requires formal prayer (*salat*) five times daily—at dawn (*al-fajr*), midday (*al-zuhr*), afternoon (*alk-‘asr*), sunset (*al-maghrib*), and evening (*al-‘isha*).⁶ Interestingly, there is no place in the Qur’an where this formal five-part delineation is prescribed. The notion of multiple prayer times is mentioned twice—17:78 enjoins one to “perform the prayer at the setting of the sun and until darkness of night and the recitation of dawn... for part of the night, wake up and recite...” and 11:114 instructs one to “perform the prayer at the two ends of the day and for some hours of the night.” Prayer is mentioned any number of other times (eg, 2:238, 4:103 and 24:58), as well, but the point is that the arrival at the five prescribed times is part of the process of interpreting the intent of the revealed word, first elaborated in the Muslim tradition by way of *hadith*—and that process is at the heart of religious sensibility.⁷

Judaism requires formal prayer three times a day: in the morning (*shaharit*), at midday (*minhah*) and in the evening (*ma’ariv*), but that requirement is nowhere specifically articulated in the Hebrew Bible.⁸ There are scattered references to praying three times a day—thus we are told of the eponymous hero in Daniel 6:10 that “[he] prayed three times a day” and Psalm 55:17 intones: “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray and cry aloud and He shall hear my voice.” But neither a precise time frame nor a statement of prescription for Israelites or Judaeans

is found within the text. The prescription comes through the discussion in the interpretive Rabbinic literature, specifically tractate *Brachot* (“Blessings”) in which the evening prayer is said to have been added after the destruction of the Second Temple (in 70 CE) and “evening” is said to begin at the third hour, which corresponds to our 6 PM.

Of further interest is the fact that the Judaeen prayer times—which would become the Jewish prayer times—are referenced in the primary *Christian* revelation, the New Testament, as present within late first century Judaeenism. Acts 2:14 speaks of the morning prayer of the “first hour”—9 AM in our terms—and Acts 3:1 and 10:9 refer to the afternoon prayer of the “Second hour.” This would tend to confirm the idea that the evening prayer was added later—by which time Judaeenism had finalized its bifurcation as Judaism and Christianity. As for Christianity itself, the early Church apparently prescribed following the three-prayers-per-day model, and further prescribed the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in the morning, Psalm 23 in the afternoon and Psalm 117 in the evening.

The basis for the *act* (but not particular times) of prayer is found throughout the Gospels, from the request to Jesus by the disciples, “Lord, teach us to pray” (in Luke 11.1); to Jesus’ verbal depiction of hypocrites who pray for show, in his Sermon on the Mount (in Matthew 6.5); to the depiction of Jesus exemplifying the virtue of praying alone (in Mark 1.35, Matt. 14.13, Luke 5.16, *inter alia*); to the Lord’s Prayer itself, directed by Jesus toward God the Father.⁹

But as Christianity splintered over the centuries, within its various branches specific prescriptions regarding when and what to pray would come to vary from one confession to another.

Christianity also evolves a wide range of monastic orders—an idea virtually non-existent in Judaism and Islam—which offer varied prescriptions with regard to frequency and times of prayer, which programs are by definition distinguishable from the far more relaxed pattern followed by the lay community. In the former, the prescribed prayer times echo what one finds in Judaism and Islam, while in the latter many traditional Christians will offer formal prayers on Sundays, Holy Days, and at the evening meal time but not at other times during the day or the week.¹⁰

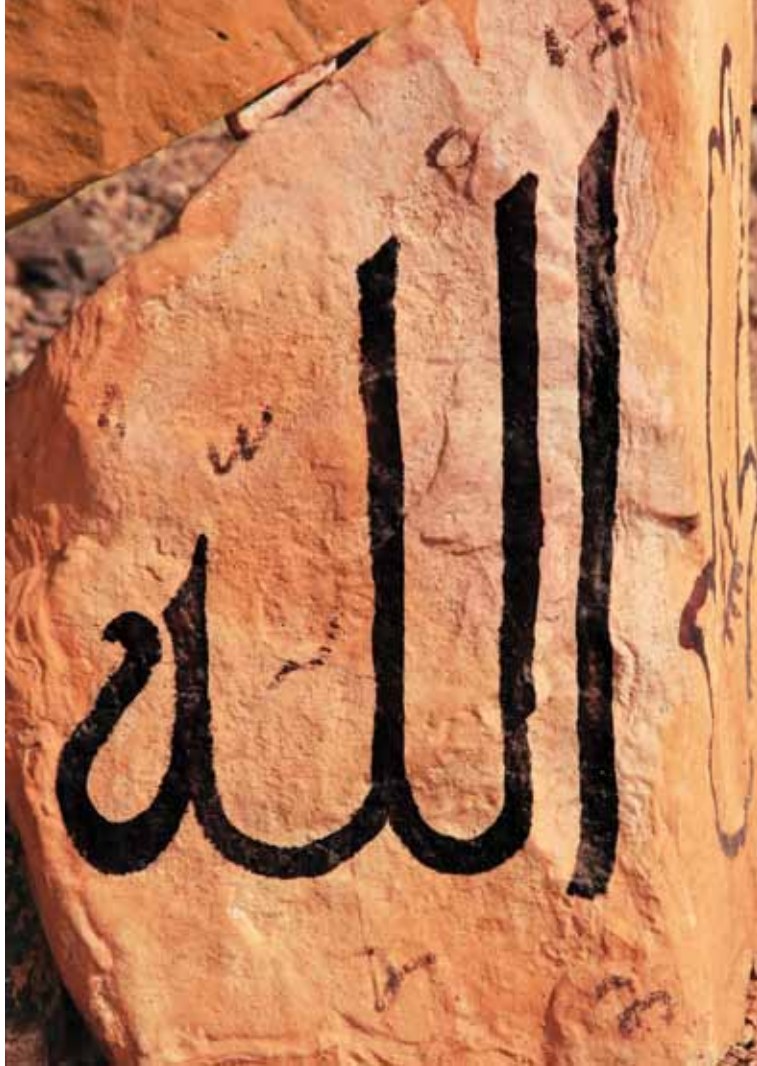
Thus formal prayer times evolve as concepts in the Muslim and Jewish and parts of the Christian traditions, each of which also embraces the notion of informal prayers. Islam offers a particular term for this—*du'a*—whereas Judaism and Christianity do not. They all view the purpose of prayer as twofold: to aggrandize God—or God's name—and to petition God.

On the other hand, the weight placed on prayer and other liturgical sequences on a *particular* day during the week is heaviest in Judaism, with its concept of a more than 24-hour Sabbath (on Saturday) during which one abstains from a whole host of everyday activities; less heavy in Christianity, where the host of ceased-from activities (on Sunday) is less and applies to a shorter time period (essentially the

daylight hours); and lightest in Islam, where the most obvious obligation on that day (Friday) is to join the community within the mosque for the noon-time prayer but otherwise one may go about one's business.¹¹

The essential contents of the prayers uttered formally in these three traditions follow parallel patterns. These reflect both the overarching point of religious devotion and the general purpose of prayer. Thus praise of God—including, in Judaism and Islam, emphasis on God's unity and singularity, and in Christianity on God's triune nature—is central. Thus the *sh'ma* in Jewish prayer and the *fatihah* in Muslim prayer share an emphasis on the conviction that there is no God but God, as the emphasis in the Catholic prayerbook is on the Trinity.¹² But where the Jewish and Christian emphasis is limited to God, Islam adds to that emphasis a focus on Muhammad—in particular in the final declaration (*Tashahhud*), reference is made to Muhammad as the servant and messenger of God—and to Abraham as the prophetic starting point of which Muhammad is the culmination. The primary prayer texts, not surprisingly, derive variously from biblical and qur'anic sources.

Within the context of an individual's formalized praise of and petition to God, there is also emphasis on the community—even when praying alone. Not only do we invoke blessings particularly “on the house of Israel” or “on the people of Muhammad”, for example, but the end of the prayer process in Islam is turning to the right and the left and reciting the *taslima* (“Peace Be



the broad purpose of tying one's self (back) to God—then do these traditions prescribe linguistically more and less efficacious modes of prayer? The answer is varied. For traditional Judaism there is no question: the Hebrew language is the most efficacious instrument of engaging God. After all, according to that tradition, God delivered the definitive set of instructions regarding how one should *be* in the world—the Torah—in Hebrew, so clearly that language is God's "preferred" language. Islam asserts the same—regarding Arabic: it is

Upon to You")—even when praying alone. Thus being part of a community is underscored, as is the importance of language as a human instrument of communication with each other (and not only with God), by means of "addressing" others in prayer.

Which leads to the question: what are the linguistic parameters of prayer in each of these three traditions? Put otherwise, if the point and purpose of prayer is to communicate in some fundamental way with God for the purpose of praise and petition—for

God's "preferred language," since after all, God delivered the definitive set of instructions regarding how to be in the world—the Qur'an—in Arabic. Thus both Judaism and Islam look to Hebrew and Arabic, respectively, as their primary language of prayer. Christianity provides a more ambiguous sensibility on this matter. Certain branches of the Church prefer certain languages. Thus for Roman Catholicism Latin was, until the late 1960s, the preferred language of prayer, in large part because as the Church in Rome became definitively in-

tertwined with the Roman Empire after 380 as its official form of faith, Latin was the language of administration and wide-reaching communication.

But within a century of that development, the Western part of the Empire collapsed (in 476, under Romulus Augustulus), leaving an Eastern Empire that for the next millennium relied primarily on Greek for administrative and related purposes—including that of communicating with God through prayer. Thus long before the definitive schism of 1054 between the Eastern and Western churches throughout Europe at least two primary languages offered themselves as the most appropriate for prayer—although there is no evidence that anyone imagined that God necessarily spoke or preferred either of these languages.

Indeed, not only is there some strong evidence to suggest that the Gospels read in the “original” Greek language were translations of Aramaic originals,¹³ but when St Jerome rendered these same texts into Latin, his purpose was to make them accessible to people for whom Latin was their common language, rather than Greek. Thus his translation is referred to as the Vulgate—from the Latin word, *vulgus* (from which we also derive the word “vulgar”), meaning “the people.” Jerome’s “model” came to govern the ambitions of Christianity to overpower the world: those ambitions were imbued with a sense that the most effective way to spiritually persuade was by meeting diverse peoples on their own linguistic grounds. When the brothers Cyril and Methodius, for example, set

forth from their Byzantine Greek-speaking and -praying world to convert the Slavs, part of their methodology was to create a Greek-based writing system, since known as Cyrillic, through which to offer God’s word not only in spoken Slavic but in written Slavic as well.

The same may be seen of other languages as they became vehicles for transmitting God’s word to a far-flung Christianity constituency.¹⁴ Thus language after language has served as the verbal vehicle for prayer. Eventually even Roman Catholicism relented and began to offer the Mass in the various languages of the countries where Catholic churches and their praying constituents may be found, so that those constituents, understanding rather than reciting by rote, may more fully engage God through words they comprehend. This has had some consequences with regard to the contents of Catholic prayer. For instance, uncomplimentary words recited uncomprehendingly over the centuries regarding the Jews and their disbelief in the divinity of Jesus were ultimately softened or altogether eliminated.

Where Islam is concerned, even as the faith spread like wildfire up out of the ‘Arab and across North Africa into Spain on the one hand and as far to the east as India on the other—within 90 years of the Prophet Muhammad’s death, and eventually far beyond those geographic endpoints—and came to encompass an endless array of adherents, the sense of the importance of Arabic as a unifier remained intact. Thus not only was the Qur’an not translated into other languages, which meant

that those who studied it had either to study Arabic or find a teacher whom they trusted who could understand Arabic to relate its contents to them, but proper prayer would be conducted in a language as universal as are the body positions that accompany it.

One of the aspects of this, if we think in historical rather than purely theological terms, is the contrastive manner in which the three Abrahamic faiths emerged onto the stage of history. Judaism and Christianity were born as siblings, both laying claim in the first few centuries CE to offering the God-approved continuation of the Hebrew-Israelite-Judaeen tradition that extended from Abraham through the time of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE.

The schism that yielded the siblings derived, in part, from the question of how to conceive God and thus how to understand the role of Jesus of Nazareth in spiritual history; and of what the concept “messiah” means.¹⁵ Concomitant with this issue the question arose of which texts to understand as divinely revealed and of how to interpret those that both sides of the schism shared. And of course, following from these basic questions there emerged different senses of when and how to celebrate the Sabbath, which holidays ought to be on the calendar and what sort of events (notably, circumcision) should or should not be part of the life cycle.

By the time this situation had reached a point by which even the pagan Roman authorities could recognize two distinct groups that could be called “Jewish” and “Christian”—the early

second century CE—the Judaeen polity had long lost its political independence. So Judaism (as opposed to “Judaeenism”) never had a political basis. By the time Christianity was being embraced by the Emperor Theodosius as the official *religio* of his empire, (ca 380 CE), Judaism was well on its way to becoming a far-flung archipelago of spiritual islands within vast seas of other faiths.

Thus one of the elements of identity to which Judaism clung tenaciously was the specialness of Hebrew as a unifying linguistic structure that connects island to island across these vast seas, both with regard to reading and studying God’s word and with regard to offering up words to God. Christianity was, in its first few generations, a dispersed and oppressed minority (as Judaism became). Even at its most linguistically unified, its Latin language was not sanctified—perhaps because the earliest Christians, coming out of the Israelite-Judaeen tradition, still regarded Hebrew that way. And besides, the first biblical texts that became the basis for Christian scriptural thought may have been read in Greek translation. These were called “Septuagint.” That term, meaning “seventy” in Greek, referred to the assertion that the translation itself was divinely inspired, since exactly the same version was arrived at by every one of a group of seventy scholars who translated in isolation from each other. But that also meant that translation of God’s word was legitimized (*contra* Judaism’s view)—a notion subsequently validated by Jerome.

Of course, the language that Jesus and his followers actually spoke on the

street was Aramaic, and interestingly, while there is no trace of that language in Western Christian modes of prayer, the language used by various Eastern denominations, Syriac, is a form of Aramaic. More interesting, still, is the fact that, within the basic Jewish prayerbook there remain several important prayers in Aramaic, suggesting that for certain *types* of prayer, the most sacred of languages need not be used, but rather the language which, nearly two millennia ago, every Judean/Jew in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East would have understood. Thus the “mourners’ prayer”—which is not a prayer at all, in fact, but an affirmation of faith in God’s greatness and goodness (offered at a time when, in grief over the death of a loved one, one might be most angry at God)—is entirely in Aramaic.

In contrast to Judaism and Christianity, Islam, virtually from its beginning combined being a mode of spirituality with being a polity led by the very prophetic conduit (Muhammad) through which God spoke, and then by his successors. Islam looked to Arabic as a unifying force across its contiguous seas, both for reading and studying God’s word and with regard to offering up words to God. Even as the faith spread far and wide, encompassing diverse peoples and their languages, even as the faith split into Sunni and Sh’i factions, and even as other modes of addressing God and expressing the Divine-human relationship might be carried out in other languages—poetry and commentary in Persian or Urdu or Turkish, to name just a few among

many—Arabic retained its unassailable status as the language of prayer.¹⁶

But to come full circle: the problem of verbal language with regard to addressing and describing God has yielded other than verbal instrumentation, such as visual symbols and physical gestures and movements. In our era, following Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, even the academic world recognizes that language need not be verbal. The language of prayer in the Abrahamic traditions reflects both this truth and the fact of historical, spiritual diversity. Thus the Israelite-Judean and then Jewish tradition eschewed praying with other than a bowed head and slightly bent knee in order to distinguish itself from the pagan traditions which were perceived (correctly or not) as accompanying their offerings to false gods with full-body prostration.¹⁷ The early Church, either because of its overt ties to Hellenistic paganism and/or in order to distinguish itself from the early Synagogue, embraced moments of falling to the knees in the course of prayer—a practice still essential in some denominations, such as Catholicism, but rejected in others.

Islam, consistent with its very name—Islam means “submission” or “surrender” (to God’s will)—elevates the notion of prostration to a carefully delineated series of *raka’ats* that govern not only the changing placement of the hands (from behind the ears, to next to the sides, to the front of the lower thighs) but of the body, from a standing and bowing position to one of kneeling and placing one’s forehead to the ground to one of rising from the

waist while still kneeling. So what was anathema at the advent of Judaism has become not only obligatory but ritually regulated with the advent of Islam.

Myriad modes of communicating with God may be discerned in each of the Abrahamic traditions. The language of prayer, as a verbal instrument that does or does not lay claim to a particular language as the most effective means of communication, and as a non-verbal instrument that does or does not prescribe particular physical movements and positions, both connects Judaism, Christianity and Islam and separates them from each other. The diversity of the human interpretive

mechanism regarding God's revelations to us, whereby one individual or group determines that God's intention is best understood in this way rather than that way, is reflected not only within the language of prayer but across myriad aspects of religion. Interpretation both splinters each of the Abrahamic traditions into many smaller confessions and connects them to the endless range of traditions that extend beyond the heirs of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar to the four corners of humanity—and hopefully to the God who made us all and can hearken to all languages.

NOTES

1. The root, more precisely, consists of a vowel, usually either "i" or "e" (thus *leg-* as well as *lig-*) and may be found in English words such as "ligament" (that binds muscle to bone) and "ligature" (that, in medicine, binds a wound).
2. The paradox of the Christian concept of a triune God, that is both one and yet offers three distinct manifestations of that oneness, is not conceptually distant from the Hindu god-concept, albeit the latter is more complex in terms of multiple manifestations of a single godhead.
3. In the later Christian tradition, a further schism with regard to revealed textuality will yield the rejection by Protestantism of certain texts as Apocryphal that Catholic and Orthodox Christian denominations embrace as Deutero-canonical (also known as Inter-testamental) texts.
4. See Ori Z Soltes, *Our Sacred Signs: How Jewish, Christian and Muslim Art Draw from the Same Source* (New York: Westview Press, 2005) for a discussion of this.
5. The Greek word, *mythos*, from which we derive this English word, simply means "account." To Hesiod's audience, the *Theogony*—in which he spends the first 117 verses of his poem invoking the assistance of the gods (through their handmaidens, the muses) to assure that he gets the account *right*—is, by definition, a *God's truth account*. He could only have received such information about the birth of the gods through divine revelation, since he could not have been there when it happened and he would never have dreamed of making it up. To Jews, Christians and Muslims, the account is not true.
6. The Arabic word, *salat* (or *salah*) essentially means "connection," thus underscoring the purpose of prayer as an aspect of religion that binds one back to God.
7. Indeed, whereas the five *times* of prayer are offered at the times stated above according to the Sunni and Musta'li Ismaili Shi'i traditions, a Shia Twelver *fiqh* allows two sets of these to be performed in succession, and thus not according to the schedule prescribed in the other traditions.
8. There are those who have argued that the Jews of Arabia prayed five times a day, which inspired Muhammad to prescribe that number of daily prayers for his followers, but the internal Muslim tradition, on the contrary, ascribes the number to the prescription presented in the hadith regarding the *mir'aj* (the ascent of Muhammad to heaven on the night journey—*'isra*—laconically referenced in Qur 17:1). In the hadith, God originally proposed a 50-prayers-per-day regimen but, on the advice

of Moses, Muhammad negotiates to limit the number to five. See E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Judaism and Islam* (New York: Yoseloff Publishers, 1961) and the *'isra/mir'aj* hadiths of 'Abdallah b. Mas'ud and Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, (among others).

9. This is also known as the "Our Father" prayer, and is found in two variant forms in Matt 6.9ff—which includes six, or possibly seven, petitions—and Luke 11.2ff (in response to the request from the disciples for help in praying properly), which includes five petitions.

10. When St Benedict of Nursia laid out the first monastic Rule in the West, in 529, he did not specify precise guidelines for the celebration of the Christian liturgy. In the early, pre-Benedictine, centuries of the monastic tradition, emphasis was on the Psalms, and monks sought to sing through its entirety throughout the week by parceling them out along thrice-daily lines, but Benedict lessened the burden of precision, in order to allow more effective space for the fulfillment of other monastic duties, ordaining that only the Psalms for Compline (recited before going to bed) be fixed. Eventually the Benedictine course of prayer came to be articulated (beginning, as in the Jewish tradition, in the evening) as *Vespers* (end of day prayers—probably six PM), *Compline* (upon retiring—probably 7:30 PM), *Vigils* (during the night), *Matins* (at sunrise), *Prime* (during the first hour of daylight—probably 6 AM), *Terce* (at the third hour—probably 9 AM), *Sext* (at the sixth hour—probably noon), and *None* (at the ninth hour (probably 3 PM)). The Cistercian Order—a consequence of later monastic reforms instituted by St Bernard of Clairvaux in 1098—observes prayer day to begin with *Vigils* (around 4 AM, while it is still dark), continuing with *Lauds*, at daybreak, followed by *Terce*, *Sext*, *None*, *Vespers* and *Compline*. Other orders offer variations of these schedules, but outside the monastic context no Christian denomination follows such a rigorous prayer procedure.

11. The communal Friday noon prayers receive their own designating term as *jumu'ah* prayers.

12. Thus "Hearken, oh Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one" (*Sh'ma*) is fundamental to every Jewish prayer service; "God is the Greatest" is the start of every Muslim prayer session and "In the name of God, most gracious and merciful" (*al-Fatiha*) is obligatory before every change of body position (*raka'ah*); and "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit" is found in every Catholic prayer session (*Lauds*, *Vespers* and *Compline*).

13. Interestingly, one of the more compelling debates within the scholarly Christian community centers on the question of what language Jesus used in which to offer the "Our Father" prayer. The consensus is Aramaic, since that was the *lingua franca* of the community of which he and the disciples were part. One scholar, J. Carmignac, argued in the early 1990s that Jesus would have prayed in Hebrew, since that was the standard prayer language of his community, but P. Grelot counter-argued that the "Our Father" was an informal prayer, not part of the formal liturgy, and therefore not requiring Hebrew.

14. Indeed, as many denominations emerged within specific communities, each prayed and read scripture in its own language: Coptic for the Egyptians, Amharic for the Ethiopians, Old Slavonic for the Slavs, German for the Lutherans, and so on. Not surprisingly, the *Book of Common Prayer*—first published in 1549 for the Anglican confession barely a generation after England separated from the Church at Rome under Henry VIII—offers its contents in English.

15. "Messiah" is the anglicized version of the Hebrew word, *mashiah*. Its Greek equivalent is *christos*, of which "christ" is the anglicized version. The term merely means "anointed"—and in the Hebrew Bible first referred to Saul, anointed by God through the prophet Samuel as the first king over Israel; it last referred to Cyrus, the Achaemenid Medo-Persian shah who enabled the exiled Judaeans to return and rebuild their Temple around 538 BCE. That the term would come to connote a divine being for some Judaeans and not for others is part of what tore the Judaeans apart.

16. Interestingly the Arabic word that denotes formal prayer, "*salat*," is replaced by speakers of Indo-Iranian, South Slavic, Albanian and Turkic languages by "*namaz*" and in Pashto by "*Imunz*"—but the language of prayer remains Arabic for all of them.

17. The exception to this is on the Day of Atonement, when the rabbi or other prayer leader kneels before the Holy Ark at certain points in the service.



The Rule of God

by Philip Zaleski

Most of us who toil in the rock-strewn fields of religious belief and practice in the early twenty-first century, as teachers, writers, priests, pundits, or adherents of this faith or that, will agree that there are two types of people who share our interests. I will call them the believer and the seeker.

I will represent the believer by my friend Peter (not his real name). Peter is a Muslim, but, as a representative of his type, he might have been a Christian, a Jew, a Sikh, or an adherent of any other traditional world religion. He reads his scripture, says his prayers, makes his devotions, helps his neighbor, tries in every way to shape his daily life in con-

formity to the will of God. Whenever I see Peter, it gladdens my heart. He has much to teach me, by word and by example. I am happy to say that the world abounds in Peters.

The seeker I will represent by my friend Sophie (another pseudonym). Sophie is young, kind, idealistic, and very different from Peter. She knows that I make my living by writing and teaching about religion and, whenever our paths cross, she seizes the occasion to talk to me about her own adventures in the spirit. Sophie is an artist, specializing in highly original, vividly colored portraits and landscapes; she appreciates beauty but fails to see its onto-

logical relationship to truth. Sophie describes herself as “spiritual but not religious,” a phrase commonly heard in the West today. She scorns what she calls “institutional” faith, believing it to be calcified and restrictive. She has little idea of how to pray and no idea of how to worship. In common with many Westerners, she understands spirituality as a form of psychology and tends to focus, in her erratic personal practice, upon methods of self-awareness and self-calming. When she looks beyond herself, she directs her well-intentioned but inchoate aspirations towards what Orthodox theologian Philip Sherrard has described as “some vague inner apprehension of the mystery of man’s own spiritual essence.” Not surprisingly, Sophie is unhappy with the results of her long search. She yearns for something “real” (her term), is puzzled at her failure to find it, yet maintains her sincerity and goodwill. Near the end of our last conversation, after recounting the futility of her latest spiritual investigations, she said to me, in a voice still filled with hope, “Oh, if only I knew where to find God!”

The world abounds in Sophies. They grow more numerous each year and now represent a significant proportion of the West’s educated elite. Recently, much media attention has focused, at least in America, on the aggressive arguments of a few prominent atheists. Their presence is not to be taken lightly – for any voice raised against God comes from darkness and promotes despair – but, in my opinion, contemporary atheism pales in significance when compared to the advent of

Sophie and her multitudinous kin. This is especially true among the young, where those who seek God blindly far outnumber those who turn their back to Him. It is the Sophies of this world who desperately need – and deserve -- our attention and our help.

What lies behind Sophie’s dilemma, and how can we assist her in her plight? If Sophie knew more about history, including the history of her own artistic calling, she might already have stumbled upon the solution. For art, in its highest configuration, is also a spiritual search, and one conducted according to definite rules. Indeed, the very nature of a rule lies at the heart of the matter. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives as its first definition of *rule*, because it is the first historically attested, “the code of discipline or body of regulations observed by a religious order or congregation.” Other definitions include “a principle, regulation, or maxim,” “good order and discipline,” “a standard of discrimination or estimation,” and, more concretely, “a shaft or beam of light,” and – this last instance should be of particular interest to Sophie -- “a straight line drawn on paper.”

I think we can all agree that a rule is what Sophie lacks. To demonstrate, in a way that Sophie might understand, the consequences of this lack, let us consider the last of the above definitions of *rule*: “a straight line drawn on paper.” Here it will help to recall the observation of the poet and watercolorist William Blake (1757-1827), whose visionary paintings Sophie much admires, that “every line is the line of beauty.”

What did Blake mean by this cryptic remark? Simply this: that beauty begins with demarcation, order, structure, form. Nor does Blake stop with beauty; as he explains, the moral order, indeed life itself in all its manifestations and effects, begins with the line:

The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art. . .How do we distinguish the oak from the beech, the horse from the ox, but by the bounding outline?. . .What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions? Leave out this line, and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist.

We may restate and enlarge Blake's dictum in this way: that all good, all truth, all beauty comes from "the line of the almighty." It is only by means of this line, this *rule*, which we receive through revelation and inspiration, that we may seek and, God willing, find perfection. Blake's dictum, you will observe, echoes the great parable of Jesus about the two builders (Matthew 7: 24-7; Luke 6: 47-49), the wise man who heeds the divine word, builds upon rock – stable, adamant, the epitome of form – and survives the storm, and the fool who scorns the divine word, builds upon sand – shifting, scattered, formless -- and is swept away.

Sophie, as I have said, fails to see the value of the line. She prefers to seek God without lines – without, as she

naively puts it, "limits." She rejects the formal structures of traditional religion, instead seeking for God hither and thither, willy-nilly, wherever her fancy leads her. In this approach, she epitomizes the observation of the Christian mystic William Law (1686-1761) that "he that thinks or holds that outward exercises of religion hurt or are too low for his degree of spirituality, shows plainly that his spirituality is only an idea" – by idea he means an abstraction, a thought-phantom, not a living reality. The "truly spiritual man," Law insists, is he

that sees God in all things, that sees all things in God, that receives all things as from Him, that ascribes all things to Him, that loves and adores Him in and for all things, in all things absolutely resigned unto Him, doing then for Him from a principle of pure and perfect love of Him. There is no spiritual person but this. . . . to think that the spirituality of religion is hurt by the observance of outward institutions of religion is as absurd as to think that the inward spirit of charity is hurt by the observance of outward acts of charity.

All people who bow before God recognize the truth of Law's words; one need only think, for example, of Ibn 'Atâ'illâh's (d. 1309) declaration that "only the ignorant person disdains ritual practice (*wird*). . . .Ritual practice He asks of thee, while illumination thou asketh of Him; and what does he ask of Thee compared to what thou asketh of Him?"¹ I wish in particular to draw your attention, though, to the remarkable closing assertion of Law's remarks. Here he draws an analogy between

the spirit of religion and religious practices, on the one hand, and the spirit of charity and charitable practices, on the other. Now, charity can only realize itself in and through loving action (by action I include charitable prayers). A charitable sentiment unaccompanied by action is charity stillborn, a form of spiritual onanism. Just so, argues Law, the “spirituality of religion” only realizes itself in and through religious action (by action, I include prayer, meditation and contemplation). “Spirituality without religion” – Sophie’s banner -- is spirituality stillborn, a will o’ the wisp, another form of spiritual onanism. Spirituality can be found only by embracing “outward institutions of religion.” This is the matrix in which spirituality thrives; this is, as every tradition tells us, the royal road to God.

There are countless ways to demonstrate the validity of this teaching. A glance at any traditional religious milieu will suffice: The *Vinaya* of the Buddhist *sangha*, the Jewish *halakhah*, the Pythagorean and Stoic codes of life, all underscore the absolute necessity of a rule. To explore this in greater detail, I would like to look at one rule of which I have some personal experience: that of the Roman Catholic Benedictine order of monks, in which I have been for many years an oblate (a lay person formally affiliated to a Benedictine monastery).

The Benedictine way, as laid out in St. Benedict’s (480-587) Rule— a slender volume that can be read in an hour and rewards a lifetime of study — has only one aim: to help the monk to “arrive at our creator by a straight

path” (*recto cursu perveniamus ad creatorem nostrum*).² The Rule is not designed for spiritual prodigies, although these have existed and still exist today among Benedictines, but for the monkish counterpart of Sophie and her kin. In its first paragraph, the Rule invites the monk to “listen carefully, my son, to the teachings of a master and incline the ear of your heart. . . so that through the work of obedience you may return to him from whom you had withdrawn through the sloth of disobedience.” The Benedictine life is described as “a school for the Lord’s service (*dominici scola servitii*) — a set of lines drawn to guide the monk towards God. It seeks nothing less than the complete transformation of the monk, his “awakening from sleep,” his surrender to the will of God, until he comes to attain what St. Bernard, a monk of the Cistercian order (itself an outgrowth of the Benedictines), called “the soul’s true unerring intuition, the unhesitating apprehension of truth.”

Thus we find at the very beginning of the Rule all that Sophie lacks: a school, a curriculum, a method, a structure for prayer, worship, and the regulation of daily life. This school is not something invented out of whole cloth by St. Benedict; nor is it merely a composite of Rules established before him by earlier Christian monks, going back to the hermits of the Egyptian desert. Benedict’s school and its methods are at every turn informed by scripture — that is, by revealed and inspired truth. The principle that guides this school is *instruction from above*. This principle, if faithfully followed, results in a life of

contemplation: a life of remembering God, of standing before him in naked sinfulness and sorrow, of doing combat with his enemies – our own illusions, habits, and wayward desires – and of rejoicing in his presence.

In sum, St. Benedict's Rule describes, prescribes, and gives birth to a Christian culture, whose aim is to make of every monk a saint.

As a culture, the Benedictine way cultivates body, mind, and heart. The body is strengthened and regulated through manual labor, often tied to farming, beekeeping, animal husbandry, or other activities dependent upon nature's rhythms. The mind is trained and focused through scholastic study – Benedictine history teems with prominent scholars – and through *lectio divina*, a method of prayer in which a passage from scripture or the Church Fathers is read, meditated upon, and prayed over. The heart is trained through ascetic practices grounded in obedience and humility. The theme of obedience runs throughout the Rule; for only through obedience does the ego lose its stranglehold upon the soul. The monk is enjoined to "obedience without delay" in imitation of Christ, for through obedience he assumes into himself the holy example of one who came "not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). Humility makes obedience possible, allowing the monk to perceive his weakness, confusion, and failures, and the degree to which he needs the help of God. Humility, as St. Benedict describes it, is a ladder built of paradox, for upon it we "descend by exaltation and ascend by humility." Ex-

tending the metaphor, he describes the ladder as "our life in the world," the sides of the ladder as "our body and soul," and its rungs as "humility and discipline."

The Rule places the transformed monk in a refigured world. Here art recovers its traditional nature, as the creation of things both beautiful and useful for the service of God and man (stained glass, painting, sculpture, weaving, etc.). Space is sanctified by various holy enclosures: the monastic grounds, the church sanctuary, the ciborium. Time is sanctified by the Divine Office, a daily round of eight sessions (thus an octave) of prayer, including psalms, hymns, readings, and prayers, and chanted by traditional Benedictines in the medieval musical form known as Gregorian chant or plainchant. This punctuation of time by periods of prayer, which places each phase of the day (night, dawn, mid-morning, noon, mid-afternoon, dusk, evening, in the Benedictine arrangement) in God's hands, can be found in many traditions: the Brahmin's daily round, highlighted by the Gayatri prayer is one example, the five daily prayers of Islam another. A hadith describes the salutary effect of performing the *salat*:

Abu Hurairah relates that he heard the Holy Prophet say: Tell me if one of you had a stream running at his door and he should take a bath in it five times every day would any dirt be left upon him? The Holy Prophet observed: This is the case of the five Prayers. Allah wipes out all faults in consequence of them.³

For a personal account of a spiritual transformation wrought by a regular round of prayers, let us listen to Cistercian monk Thomas Merton (1915-1968) as he recalls his discovery of the Divine Office long before he donned the monastic habit:

I ripped the paper off the package, and took out the cardboard box containing the set of four books, bound in black leather, marked in gold.

I handed [my brother] one of the volumes. It was sleek and smelled new. The pages were edged in gold. There were red and green markers.

"What are they?" said John Paul.

"Breviaries [prayer books]."

I did not have any lofty theories about the vocation of a lay-contemplative. In fact, I no longer dignified what I was trying to do by the name of a vocation. All I knew was that I wanted grace, and that I needed prayer, and that I was helpless without God. ... and from the secret places of His essence, God began to fill my soul with grace in those days, grace that sprung from deep within me, I could not know how or where. But yet I would be able, after not so many months, to realize what was there, in the peace and the strength that were growing in me through my constant immersion in this tremendous, unending cycle of prayer, ever renewing its vitality, its inexhaustible, sweet energies, from hour to hour, from season to season in its returning round.⁴

The "constant immersion" of which Merton speaks may prepare the ground for the profoundest sort of religious awakening. This seems to have been the case with Merton, who, after 28 years of immersion in monastic rhythms, was able to perceive, a week

before his death, standing before the colossal Buddhist statues of Polonnaruwa in Ceylon

the silence of the extraordinary faces. The great smiles. Huge and yet subtle. Filled with every possibility, questioning nothing, knowing everything, rejecting nothing. . . . Looking at these figures I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things, and an inner clearness, clarity, as if exploding from the rocks themselves, became evident and obvious... All problems are resolved and everything is clear.⁵

For a Benedictine, the epitome of such experiences may be the ecstasy of St. Benedict, recounted by his biographer, St. Gregory the Great. Praying alone one night, while his fellow monks slept, St. Benedict looked out a window and saw "a light spreading from on high and completely repelling the darkness of the night. It shone with such splendor that it surpassed the light of day." Then, as he watched, "the whole world was brought before his eyes, gathered up, as it were, under a single ray of sun."⁶ This vision of God's divine light and of the world compressed and afloat in a ray of this light is, in a way, the culmination and proof of a life lived according to a Rule.

* * *

The vexing question remains: how will Sophie come to know God's rule? Certainly, she needs holy teachings to guide her, holy lives to inspire her. I would like to take her to a traditional Benedictine monastery, so that she

may breathe an atmosphere of peace and contemplation. I would like to introduce her to my friend Peter, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, and to others like him who pray and worship according to a sacred rule. These sorts of actions are easy enough. But they remain individual efforts, and I suspect that much more will be required in order to persuade a multitude of Sophies. What we desperately need is a cultural reawakening on a grand scale, so that prayer and worship once again find their rightful place in public and private life. It is just here that the great religions, despite their doctrinal differences, must work together.

At times the task seems nearly impossible, doesn't it? There is, however, one approach that will not fail: prayer and more prayer, on Sophie's part and on ours. Let us remember that God never promises in vain. With this in mind, can there be any more heartening words than these, from the New Testament and the Qur'an?:

For everyone who asks, receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Luke 11:10, RSV)

And when My servants question thee concerning Me, then surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he crieth unto Me (Qur'an 2:186)⁷

NOTES

1. From *Al-Hikam al-'Atâ'iyah*, no. 124, Cairo, 1939, unpubl. tr. by Yahyâ Abû Bakr and Whitall N. Perry, quoted in Whitall N. Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (Cambridge U.K., Quinta Essentia, 1991), p. 286-287

2. All passages from St. Benedict's Rule are drawn from *The Rule of St. Benedict*, edited and translated by Bruce L. Venarde (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011)

3. Al-Nawawî, *Gardens of the Righteous, Riyadh as-Salihin*, translated from the Arabic by Muhammad Zafrulla Khan (London: Curzon Press 1975), p. 192

4. Merton, Thomas, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (Mariner Books), p. 329

5. Merton, Thomas, *Asian Journals* (New York: New Directions, 1975), pp. 233-235

6. Gregory the Great, *The Life of St. Benedict*, Commentary by Adalbert de Vogue, Translated by Hilary Costello and Eoin de Bhaldraithe (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1993), p. 164

7. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, An Explanatory Translation by Marmaduke Pickthall (New York: Knopf, 1930, 1992).



Dispassion and Pure Prayer

The Principles and Practice of Imageless Prayer in the Hesychast Tradition from Evagrius to St. Hesychios, with special reference to St. Isaac of Qatar

By Vincent Rossi

Prayer is the root, trunk, branches, leaves and fruit of all spiritual growth, according to the masters of prayer in the Hesychast tradition of the Christian East, enshrined most completely in that renowned collection of spiritual texts known as the *Philokalia*. Better to “choose death than to remain for a moment without prayer,” say Sts. Kallistos and Ignatius; for “the soul which does not move toward prayer is dead.”¹ Prayer accompanies the soul at every stage of its long spiritual journey to union with God. As St. Theophan the Recluse, a Russian staretz of the 19th century and the translator of the *Philokalia* into Russian, puts it most succinctly: “Prayer is the test of everything; prayer is also the source of everything; prayer is the driving force of everything; prayer is also the director of everything.”² Unceasing prayer is the goal of the hesychast, and there is no other

way to attain unceasing prayer than the way of dispassion, so the struggle toward dispassion must also be unceasing. There can be no growth toward dispassion without watchfulness (*nepsis*) or sobriety and the guarding of the heart.

What then is dispassion (*apatheia*) and why is it necessary for prayer? St. Isaac of Qatar³ (more commonly known as Isaac the Syrian) defines dispassion thusly:

Dispassion does not mean that a man feels no passions, but that he does not accept any of them. Owing to the many and various virtues, both evident and hidden, acquired by the saints, the passions have grown feeble in them and cannot easily rise up against their soul. Nor does the mind need to keep constant watch on them, because its concepts are at all times filled with study and intercourse with most excellent subjects, which are stirred in the intellect by the activity of insight. As soon as the passions begin to arise, the mind is suddenly ravished away from them by a certain insight that penetrates into the intellect, and the passions recede from it as being inactive.⁴

St. Isaac reveals both how dispassion “works” in the one nearing a permanent state of *apatheia*, and also indicates that dispassion grows in the soul through the acquisition of the virtues. This does not mean that the passions are killed, but through the virtues, they are not fed, and they gradually grow weaker and more feeble, until the mind does not even need to guard against them, being so filled with the

energy of insight. Passionlessness does not happen all at once, but only as a result of long struggle with the passions accompanied by struggle in prayer. As with prayer, so too with dispassion, its acquisition proceeds by degrees, as is clearly explained by St. Maximos the Confessor:

“The first type of dispassion is complete abstention from the actual committing of sin, and it may be found in those beginning the spiritual way. The second is the complete rejection in the mind of all assent to evil thoughts; this is found in those who have achieved an intelligent participation in virtue. The third is the complete quiescence of passionate desire; this is found in those who contemplate noetically the inner essences of visible things through their outer forms. The fourth type of dispassion is the complete purging even of passion-free images; this is found in those who have made their intellect a pure, transparent mirror of God through spiritual knowledge and contemplation” (*Q. Thal 5*, P.G. 90 – 540CD)⁵

In this passage from the great Confessor, we see that overcoming the passions is completely bound up with the stages of the spiritual life as understood and practiced in the philokalic ascetic tradition, from purgation to illumination to union with God by means of the struggle to keep the commandments and acquire the virtues, which leads to greater success in prayer, opening the way first to the spiritual contemplation of nature (“contemplate noetically the inner essences [*logoi*] of visible things”) and then to “theology” or the union

with God through knowledge and contemplation.

Evagrius of Pontos makes it clear that the foundation for what he terms the “state of prayer” is dispassion, and dispassion in prayer produces the holy participation in divine love: “the state of prayer is a condition which is devoid of passions, snatching the philosophical and spiritual mind up on high in the most intense love” (*On Prayer*, 53)⁶. He says further in the next chapter (54) that “anyone who is eager to pray truly must not only rule his temper and his desire, he must also come to be free from every thought that is attended by passion” (*On Prayer*, 54). Prayer is thus not only the chief weapon of the soul in the spiritual combat of the unseen war, it is also the heart of the battleground itself:

“The whole war between us and the unclean demons is about nothing else except spiritual prayer, because spiritual prayer is particularly offensive and intolerable to them and particularly beneficial and propitious for us” (*On Prayer*, 50).

The “war between us and the unclean demons” is the chief reason that true, inner prayer is so hard to achieve, and why it is that the hesychast must fight for every foot of ground in prayer and why the condition of the soul itself, its tone, its progress toward dispassion, is so fundamental in the art of prayer. Yet, difficult as it is to achieve, the state of dispassion is not itself a sign that true or pure prayer has been attained. Dispassion is the essential condition for

true prayer, but it is not prayer itself, as Evagrius goes on to say:

“The attainment of dispassion does not of itself mean that one is already praying truly; it is possible that one is still engaged with bare thoughts (*no-emata*: which could also be translated: simple intellections, conceptual images or mental representations), distracted by investigating them, and that one is therefore still far from God.” (*On Prayer*, 56).

To understand the significance of the foregoing observation and the depth of discernment required even to make it, is to realize that we are now peering into the realm of the spiritual psychology of hesychasm, the true noetic science of mental prayer in the heart, formed in the fire of the experience of the desert fathers and formulated through the accumulated observations of the two thousand year transmission of spiritual wisdom from the masters of prayer to their disciples. True prayer is a kind of frontier. But the frontier is not “out there” in the world of created things; rather the frontier is reached when we journey within, fighting our way through the multitude of thoughts, impressions, memories, perceptions and passions that crowd and jostle and block the way to the center of the heart:

“When your intellect in its great longing for God gradually withdraws from the flesh and turns away from all thoughts that have their source in our sense-perception, memory or soul-body temperament, and when it becomes full of reverence and joy, then

you may conclude that you are close to the frontiers of prayer” (*On Prayer*, 62)

The concept of prayer’s “frontier” conveys an image of a journey from a known and familiar place to an unknown land of unfamiliar and unexpected beauty, delight amazement and possibly danger as well, requiring an extraordinary state of preparedness, vigilance and attention. The absolutely necessary virtue or practice for the hesychast seeking the frontiers of prayer, according to the *Philokalia*, is *nepsis*, which is usually translated as “sobriety” or “watchfulness”.⁷ A great teacher of *nepsis* in the *Philokalia* is St. Hesychios the Presbyter⁸, who sums up the entire path of *nepsis* in the opening “sentence” or “chapter” of his work entitled “On Watchfulness and Holiness”, found in the first volume of the English translation of the *Philokalia*:

“Watchfulness is a spiritual method which, if sedulously practiced over a long period, completely frees us with God’s help from impassioned thoughts, impassioned words and evil actions. It leads, in so far as this is possible, to a sure knowledge of the inapprehensible God, and helps us to penetrate the divine and hidden mysteries. It enables us to fulfill every divine commandment in the Old and New Testaments and bestows upon us every blessing of the age to come. It is, in the true sense, purity of heart, a state blessed by Christ when He says: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Matt. 5:8); and one which, because of its spiritual nobility and beauty – or, rather, because of our negligence – is now extremely

rare among monks. Because this is its nature, watchfulness is to be bought only at a great price. But once established in us, it guides us to a true and holy way of life. It teaches us how to activate the three aspects of our soul correctly, and how to keep a firm guard over the senses. It promotes the daily growth of the four principal virtues, and is the basis of our contemplation”⁹

In the writings of St Hesychios the Presbyter, we find a river of wisdom and knowledge of prayer, the waters of which are built up by the accumulation and in-pouring of all the tributaries of the entire ascetic tradition that is the foundation of the hesychastic practice of the Jesus Prayer, from the Desert Fathers, through Evagrius, St. Macarios, St. John Cassian, St. Mark the Ascetic, St. Diadochos of Photiki, St. Maximos the Confessor and St. John Climakos. In the above passage we note first that St Hesychios refers to *nepsis*/watchfulness as a spiritual method. Watchfulness is precisely the method par excellence that will lead the hesychast unerringly to put his mind in his heart and to practice the Jesus Prayer standing before God with the mind in the heart. The practice of watchfulness will lead us to true health of soul which is dispassion, because it “completely frees us with God’s help from impassioned thoughts, impassioned words and evil actions”. St. Hesychios equates dispassion with “purity of heart” and points to the sixth Beatitude from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.”¹⁰ Hence, watchfulness practiced over a long period becomes true

sobriety or dispassion, which as purity of heart is the gate of contemplation, because by and through it, we shall see God. *Nepsis*, because of its spiritual nobility and beauty—because of its very nature as purity of heart—can only be acquired at a great price. But it is worth the price, the price of “giving blood to receive Spirit”¹¹, or “choosing death rather than to remain for a moment without prayer”, because by it we are truly healed and enabled to live a true and holy way of life. We are enabled by grace to acquire the virtues, by which we literally “put on Christ”, and it is the basis of true and authentic contemplation.

Is watchfulness (*nepsis*) the same as attention (*prosoche*)? Watchfulness is the way one uses one’s attention. Watchfulness is the conscious effort to keep the attention of the intellect (*nous*) centered in and focused on the heart. Watchfulness is thus the proper use of the power of attention, which “if sedulously practiced” will lead to stillness, passionlessness, and the unceasing invocation of the Jesus Prayer in the heart:

“Attentiveness is the heart’s stillness unbroken by any thought. In this stillness the heart breathes and invokes, endlessly and without ceasing only Jesus Christ who is the Son of God and himself God...Watchfulness is a continual fixing and halting of thought at the entrance of the heart...Continuity of attention produces inner stability; inner stability produces a natural intensification of watchfulness; and this intensification gradually, and in due measure gives contemplative insight into spiritual warfare...This in its turn

is succeeded by persistence in the Jesus Prayer and by the state that Jesus confers, in which the intellect (*nous*), free from all images, enjoys complete quietude" (OW, 5, 6, 7).¹²

Note here the very significant statement that persistence in the Jesus Prayer leads to "the state that Jesus confers", by which is clearly meant the state of *hesychia*—complete quietude, conferred on the watchful and dispassionate soul by the grace of Christ as the mind attains the degree of imageless prayer. St. Hesychios then goes on to define watchfulness in an amazingly precise way, preparing the soul to receive the gift from God of unceasing prayer and of achieving *apatheia*, dispassion, and entering the state of pure prayer, which is the gate of contemplation:

"I shall now tell you in plain, straightforward language what I consider to be the types of watchfulness which gradually cleanse the intellect from impassioned thoughts...One type of watchfulness consists in closely scrutinizing every mental image (*noema*) or provocation (*prosvoli*)...A second type of watchfulness consists in freeing the heart from all thoughts, keeping it profoundly silent and still, and in praying...A third type consists in continually and humbly calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ for help...A fourth type is always to have the thought of death in one's mind...If God gives me words, I shall deal more fully with a further type, which, along with the others, is also effective; this is to fix one's gaze on heaven and to pay no attention to anything material" (OW, 14-18)¹³.

St. Hesychios further clarifies the dimensions of watchfulness in the following "sentence":

"The man engaged in spiritual warfare should simultaneously possess humility, perfect attentiveness, the power of rebuttal, and prayer. He should possess humility because, as his fight is against the arrogant demons, he will then have the help of Christ in his heart, for "the Lord hates the arrogant". He should possess attentiveness in order always to keep his heart clear of all thoughts, even of those that appear to be good. He should possess the power of rebuttal so that, whenever he recognizes the devil, he may at once repulse him angrily...He should possess prayer so that as soon as he has rebutted the devil he may call to Christ with "cries that cannot be uttered" (OW, 20)¹⁴.

These two texts provide us with a complete outline of the philokalic method of *nepsis/sobriety/watchfulness* according to the teaching of St. Hesychios. Although there are other things that might be added, we may summarize the Hesychian method of the practice of *sobriety/watchfulness* in the following steps:

- 1) Humility
- 2) Attention
- 3) Rebuttal
- 4) Invocation
- 5) Remembrance

The foundation stone is humility. Without humility, which in the matter of conducting the unseen war, will embrace repentance, compunction, self-reproach, self-condemnation



irascibility or the power of anger, to rebut, reject or repulse the evil temptations, images and thoughts aimed at the heart by demonic attack or because our own fall- enness and weakness. Invocation is the use of prayer, and specifically the Jesus Prayer, be- cause St. Hesychios' en- tire teaching presuppos- es the Jesus Prayer to be the core practice of his spiritual method, as the primary activity of the mind, and the Name of Jesus as the entire con- tent of the field of one's consciousness in prayer and the supreme refuge in the spiritual war.

When St. Hesychios enumerates the types of watchfulness as quoted above, he is not really saying that there are four or five different

and refusing to judge, nothing can be achieved in spiritual warfare. Attention requires the placing of the power of our mind's concentration at the door- way to the heart and keeping it there, plus a constant and unceasing alertness to observe what one finds blocking access to or approaching or insinuating its way toward the heart. Rebuttal (*antilo- gia*) is the use of the incisive faculty of the soul, the temper, sometimes called

kinds of watchfulness; rather he is say- ing that sobriety consists in the simulta- neous possession and practice of these several different aspects of one and the same method, which he calls *nepsis* or watchfulness. He teaches that *nepsis* is the absolutely necessary basis for the inner life of vigilance, stillness, prayer and love. He maintains that the monk who wishes to discover the inner life must enter into watchfulness in a way that is extreme, intense, concentrated

and unremitting. The soul of the monk must be as full of watchfulness as the sea is full of water:

“Much water makes up the sea. But extreme watchfulness and the Prayer of Jesus Christ, undistracted by thoughts, are the necessary basis for inner vigilance and unfathomable stillness of soul, for the depths of secret and singular contemplation, for the humility that knows and assesses, for rectitude and love. This watchfulness and this Prayer must be intense, concentrated and unremitting” (OW, 10)¹⁵.

Note that extreme watchfulness or sobriety is the foundation for undistracted prayer, for stillness of soul, for humility that is itself true knowledge, and for the depths of contemplation.

Sobriety of soul and watchfulness of mind must be unremitting if we wish to climb the ladder of prayer and pass through the gate of contemplation because our enemies in spiritual warfare, the demons, are unremitting in their jealousy and their efforts to distract and counteract our prayer. “Begrudging us the benefit, knowledge and progress towards God that we derive from the battle, they try to make us careless so that they can suddenly capture our intellect and again reduce our mind to inattention. Their unremitting purpose is to prevent the heart from being attentive, for they know how greatly such attentiveness enriches the soul. We on the contrary through remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, should redouble our efforts to achieve spiritual contemplation” (OW, 30)¹⁶.

Redoubling our efforts of attention with humility, we find ourselves engaged in battle through the intellect (*nous*), moving repeatedly, sequentially and yet simultaneously through attention, rebuttal, invocation and remembrance. In a beautiful passage, where he compares the constant invocation of the Jesus Prayer in the heart to lightning flashes in the sky before it rains, St. Hesychios sums up the hesychastic method of sobriety or watchfulness as a precise sequence of noetic action that is the most effective way to engage in spiritual warfare:

“The name of Jesus should be repeated over and over in the heart as flashes of lightning are repeated over and over in the sky before rain. Those who have experience of the intellect and of inner warfare know this very well. We should wage this spiritual warfare with a precise sequence: first, with attentiveness; then, when we perceive the hostile thought attacking, we should strike at it angrily in the heart, cursing it as we do so; thirdly, we should direct our prayer against it, concentrating the heart through the invocation of Jesus Christ, so that the demonic fantasy may be dispersed at once, the intellect no longer pursuing it like a child deceived by some conjuror” (OW, 105)¹⁷.

The Prayer can thus be invoked both as a weapon in spiritual warfare and as a practice leading toward the attainment of spiritual peace or hesychia. As a weapon, when under attack by demonic provocation or temptation, Hesychios counsels: “Whenever we are filled with evil thoughts, we should throw the invocation of our Lord Jesus

Christ into their midst. Then, as experience has taught us, we shall see them instantly dispersed like smoke in the air". But as soon as the temptations are dispersed, we must renew our attention and prayer, for he goes on to say: "Once the intellect is left to itself again, we can renew our constant attentiveness and our invocation. Whenever we are distracted, we should act in this way" (OW, 98)¹⁸.

Invocation of the Name of Jesus in prayer is the very center of the practice of Hesychian sobriety and watchfulness: "Watchfulness and the Jesus Prayer, as I have said, mutually reinforce one another; for close attentiveness goes with constant prayer, while prayer goes with close watchfulness and attentiveness of the intellect" (OW, 94)¹⁹. Prayer without attention is not prayer at all, while prayer with attention is what the intellect was created for and is the intellect's highest activity, as Evagrius says: "Prayer is the energy which accords with the dignity of the intellect; it is the intellect's true and highest activity" (*On Prayer*, 84)²⁰.

The chief aim of the spiritual practice of sobriety or watchfulness is to attain the kingdom of God which is within (Luke 17: 21). The invocation of the name of Jesus may be used as a weapon in war, but its primary use is as a means to "put on Christ," as St. Paul says, to become one with the Lord, to experience the kingdom of heaven that is within, to attain to that state of pure prayer that leads, says Theophanes the Monk, to warmth of heart, a holy energy, God-given tears, peace from thoughts, purging of the intellect, the

vision of heavenly mysteries, ineffable light, the heart's illumination and, ultimately, perfection that is endless transfiguration in God.²¹

"The heart which is constantly guarded and is not allowed to receive the forms, images and fantasies of the dark and evil spirits, is conditioned by nature to give birth within itself to thoughts filled with light. For just as coal engenders a flame, or a flame lights a candle, so will God, who from our baptism dwells in our heart, kindle our mind to contemplation when He finds it free from the winds of evil and protected by the guarding of the intellect" (OW, 104)²²

Evagrius gives a classical definition of prayer, and then asks an all-important question: "Prayer is communication of the intellect (*nous*) with God. What state, then, does the intellect (*nous*) need so that it can reach out to its Lord without deflection and commune with Him without intermediary?"²³ St. Hesychios in the above text answers the question of Evagrius. The mind—or field of consciousness—needs to be kindled by God to a state of contemplation, and God will give this grace when He finds the mind free from the winds of evil and protected by the guarding of the *nous*. It is specifically the *nous* that is guarded, not the *dianoia* as reasoning faculty, and it is the field of consciousness (*dianoia*) that is kindled by God's grace with "thoughts filled with light". "Thoughts filled with light" is a way of describing contemplation, as is confirmed when he says that the mind is "kindled" by God, that is, our mind bursts into the light of contemplation

by the grace of God invoked in prayer—but not just any prayer—prayer that is prayed in the heart that is guarded to the point of dispassion by the practice of watchfulness.

The Evagrian ascetic tradition, in which St. Maximos, St. Isaac, and St. Hesychios stand, understands the movement of the soul to union with God according to the progression: *praxis*, *gnosis/theoria*, *theologia*, or *praktike* (the way of ascetic practice), *phusike* (the way of natural contemplation), *theologia* (the way of contemplation of the Holy Trinity)—that is, the ascetical life of *praxis* leads to natural contemplation (*phusike*), spiritual knowledge (*gnosis*) and the degrees of contemplation (*theoria*), which lead to *theologia*, contemplation of God, divine knowledge and union. Prayer is the indispensable beginning of the way, as well as its end.²⁴ To understand why the progression up the ladder of graces both begins and ends in prayer, we need to consider two points. The first is the famous saying of Evagrius: “if you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian (*On Prayer*, 61), which was taught in our day by St. Silouan the Athonite in these words: “If you are a theologian, your prayer is pure. If your prayer is pure, then you are a theologian”²⁵. To theologize is to pray truly and purely. The second thing we need to remember is the holistic teaching of St. Isaac the Syrian on prayer. He writes:

“Prayer is the refuge of help, a source of salvation, a treasury of assurance, a haven that rescues from the tempest, a light to those who are in darkness, a staff of the infirm, a shelter in time of

temptations, a medicine at the height of sickness, a shield of deliverance in war, an arrow sharpened against the face of his enemies, and, to speak simply: the entire multitude of these good things is found to have its entrance through prayer. From this time forward he revels in the prayer of faith, his heart glistens with clear assurance, and does not continue in its former blindness and the mere speech of the tongue”.²⁶

To know prayer as the test of everything, as the mirror of our progress, as a haven, a light, a staff, a shelter, an arrow, a shield and as the medicine of our salvation is simply to recognize that prayer is the foundation of our entire spiritual life. It is not merely something we do at certain times and in certain places in order to be “on God’s good side.” It is the fuel for the fire of our zeal in the struggle to grow in the practical life. It is the principle weapon of our fighting the unseen and spiritual war. Above all, it is the means for the hesychast to draw down the grace of the Holy Spirit that will allow him or her to attain the state of dispassion. For the goal of hesychastic ascesis, as is unanimously taught by all the ascetics and masters of the philokalic tradition, is to reach the state of dispassion. The state of dispassion is the launching pad to attain the heights of pure prayer. Pure prayer is the prayer that is experienced by the hesychast who has reached the state of dispassion through his incessant and untiring efforts to keep the commandments, acquire the virtues through ascetic practice and learn to transform his prayer from outer, vocal, bodily prayer to inner, noetic and spiri-

tual prayer. "Uninterrupted, pure and spiritual prayer" is not something that we acquire solely by our own efforts. It is something that is granted by God, as we pursue without ceasing the inner life through humility, attention, rebuttal, invocation and the remembrance of God.

There is no way to union of God without the pursuit of attention and prayer with all one's strength. Attentiveness as part of the practice of sobriety or watchfulness is the activity that solidifies the state of dispassion in the soul and leads to the attainment of contemplative vision in prayer. Contemplation is both the fruit of effective prayer and also the force that deepens prayer. St. Hesychios writes:

"The life of attentiveness, brought to fruition in Christ Jesus, is the father of contemplation and spiritual knowledge (*gnosis*)."²⁷ (OW, 46)

The "life of attentiveness", by which St. Hesychios means the whole program and method of sobriety/watchfulness that we have been outlining, is brought to completion by the grace of the invocation of the Name in prayer; and that fruition in our souls engenders contemplation and Spirit-induced gnosis. This is to say that pure prayer is a beginning that has no ending except in contemplation, a beginning that is the gateway to contemplation, through which one passes from the contemplation of nature to higher contemplations of noetic and spiritual realities to the unitive contemplation of God, and yet remains in that "prayer" that is beyond prayer. "The first step is that of purest prayer...

the ladder's lowest step prescribes pure prayer alone...and, friend, know that always experience teaches one, not words...last comes a step that has no limit—though compassed in a single line—perfection that is endless."²⁸ The ladder of spiritual graces received through prayer is in truth a ladder of endless contemplation. Pure prayer, the highest step on the path of prayer, is thus the gateway or isthmus to all contemplations, divinely given. The dispassionate heart that is in a state of pure prayer is the true gate of contemplation. What then is pure prayer? Listen to the luminous words of St. Isaac:

"Prayer is a supplication, a care, and a desire of something: of deliverance from trials here, or in the age to come, or a desire of the inheritance of the Fathers. It is a plea for something whereby a man is helped by God. The motions of prayer are delimited by these movements. Purity or impurity of prayer is to be determined in this manner: if, at the time when the mind makes ready to offer up one of its aforementioned movements, a foreign thought commingles with it, or it wanders in something, then this prayer is not to be called pure; for it has brought an unclean animal to the altar of the Lord, that is the heart, the noetic altar of God. But when the mind fervently embraces one of these motions during the time of supplication—corresponding to the compulsion of the occasion—and when on account of its great ardour the course of the motion is drawn by the eye of faith to enter within the veil of the heart, then henceforth the entrances of the soul are closed by this to alien thoughts; the same which are called strangers and which the Law forbids

entrance into the Tabernacle of Witness. This is named the acceptable sacrifice of the heart and pure prayer. Its boundaries are, again, until this point. But what lies beyond cannot be called prayer"²⁹.

Pure prayer as described by St. Isaac is the fruit of dispassion, which is itself a state of being attained by the hesychast in prayerful synergy with the divine grace of the Holy Spirit. Purity in prayer is that state in which prayer is prayed in a dispassionate heart, with a mind intensely attuned to watchfulness, a heart guarded by attention, rebuttal and the invocation of Jesus in such a way that the field of our consciousness is not polluted by temptations (*pros-voloi*) or thoughts (*logismoi*) or mental representations (*noemata*) of any kind. As long as prayer is interrupted or commingled with thoughts, memories and wanderings, it is not pure, for in St. Isaac's striking phrase, it has "brought an unclean animal to the altar of the Lord, which is the heart, the noetic altar of God."

Note how St. Isaac corroborates St. Hesychios on the role of watchfulness in prayer. If, while in the midst of any supplicatory prayer, or any prayer whatsoever according to the occasion, one raises the level of the energy of prayer and centers that prayer in the heart with intense concentration and watchfulness ("when the mind fervently embraces one of these motions during the time of supplication—corresponding to the compulsion of the occasion—and when on account of its great ardour the course of the motion is drawn by the eye of faith to enter within the veil

of the heart"), then with practice of "extreme watchfulness", the intense energy of prayer itself closes off the entrances to the soul to alien thoughts, distracting memories and spell-binding sensations, and one is able to pray truly by means of the "acceptable sacrifice of the heart" the prayer that is called pure and is pure. This is the true boundary of prayer. What exists and is experienced beyond this point cannot be called prayer. It is the divine vision of prayer that is true contemplation. Again St. Isaac:

"There exists no prayer beyond pure prayer. Every movement and every form of prayer lead the mind this far by the authority of the free will; for this reason there is a struggle in prayer. But beyond this boundary there is awestruck wonder and not prayer. For what pertains to prayer has ceased, while a certain divine vision remains, and the mind does not pray a prayer. Every mode of prayer originates from a motion, but once the intellect enters into spiritual movements, there is no longer prayer. Prayer is one thing, and the divine vision of prayer is another, even though each takes its inception from the other. For prayer is the seed, and the divine vision is the harvesting of the sheaves. Whence the reaper stands in ecstasy before the unutterable sight, how from the mean and naked seed which he sowed, such rich ears of wheat have suddenly burst forth before his eyes; then he remains entirely motionless in his divine vision. Every prayer is a supplication, or a request, or a thanksgiving, or an offering of praise. Diligently seek out whether there exists one of these modes of prayer, or a request for something, when the intellect crosses that boundary and enters into that realm. This I

ask of men who know the truth, because not everyone possesses this degree of discernment, but it belongs only to those who have beheld and ministered unto this mystery, or who have been taught by such Fathers as have attained to this, and have learned the truth from their mouths, and have passed their lives in these inquiries and the like”³⁰.

According to St. Isaac, pure prayer is a boundary beyond which what the mind experiences can no longer be called prayer. At the spiritual boundary reached by pure prayer, every mode of prayer, every energy or motion which is produced by human effort (“by the authority of the free will”) ceases, and beyond this boundary, what one experiences is not prayer, but divine vision accompanied by awestruck wonder.

Divine vision without doubt means *theoria*—vision or contemplation, for “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”. To see God is to contemplate God in the altar of our heart. This divine vision is what the hesychast tradition calls true contemplative prayer. Prayer is thus, as St. Isaac says, the seed of contemplation.³¹ Beyond the pure prayer which is grounded in dispassion and the “acceptable sacrifice of the heart”, which is none other than the divestiture of everything that stands in the way of our communion with God without intermediary (Evagrius), that is, the divestiture of the mind from deeds, passions, images, thoughts, the tie of the senses with the perceptible, all perceptible movement, and the mind itself, there is awestruck wonder, ecstasy, divine vision, the heart’s illumination and Divine union. Here in the innermost chambers of the heart is the kingdom of heaven, where Christ, dwelling in the heart of the hesychast since Baptism, awaits to guide him to that place which has no boundaries, but is but the endless perfection found always further up and further in.



NOTES

1. *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, Kadloubovsky and Palmer, trans. (London: Faber & Faber, 1951,1979), p. 200.
2. Iguumen Chariton, *The Art of Prayer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), p. 51.
3. St. Isaac, the greatest mystic and master of prayer in the Persian Christian Church, was born in Qatar in the 7th century.
4. *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*, Homily 71, D. Miller, trans. Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984). p. 347 [hereinafter, Isaac, H#, page no.]
5. English trans Palmer, Sherrard, Ware. *Philokalia*, Vol 2. London: Faber & Faber, 1981, p. 222.
6. All quotations from Evagrius, *On Prayer* are from Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, trans. *Philokalia*, Vol. 1, pp. 55-71. See also Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: the Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2003. Pp. 191-209.
7. While "sobriety" and "watchfulness" may be used interchangeably to translate the Greek *nepsis*, there is a distinction that must be noted, which is precisely the distinction between essence and energy. When we use the word "sobriety", we are referring to *nepsis* according to its essence; when we speak of "watchfulness", we are referring to *nepsis* according to its energy. The practice of *nepsis* is watchfulness; its state or condition when attained is sobriety.
8. 8th century abbot of the Monastery of the Mother of God of the Burning Bush in Sinai. Of the ascetic School of Sinai, which includes John Climacus and Philotheos of Sinai.
9. *Philokalia*, Vol 1, *On Watchfulness and Holiness* (henceforth OW), p. 162.
10. Mt. 5: 8
11. Saying common in the Eastern Christian ascetic tradition, going back at least to Longinus, one of the Desert Fathers.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 164-165.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
20. Compare Sinkewicz, p. 202: "Prayer is an activity befitting the dignity of the mind, or, indeed, the superior and pure activity and use of the mind."
21. *Philokalia*, Vol 3, Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, eds. (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 67.
22. *On Watchfulness*, Phil. Vol. 1, p.180.
23. *Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 57.
24. In another place, St. Hesychios writes: "Dispassion and humility lead to spiritual knowledge (*gnosis*). Without them, no one can see God. He who always concentrates on the inner life will acquire self-restraint. He will also be able to contemplate, theologize and pray" (OW, 67-68). This text is actually composed of two of the nine chapters of St. Maximos the Confessor that St. Hesychios quotes in his text (*Centuries on Charity*, 4: 58, 64). St. Hesychios slightly simplifies Maximos here, who delineates more fully the virtues realized through the inner life and how they relate to contemplation: The text of St. Maximos reads: "He who al-

ways concentrates on the inner life becomes restrained, long-suffering, kind and humble.” The Confessor adds long-suffering, kindness and humility to self-restraint, thus making up a group of four virtues crucial to contemplation. These four virtues remind us of the definition of watchfulness with which St. Hesychios begins his work, in which he says that watchfulness promotes the daily growth of the four principle virtues that, with sobriety itself, are the ground of contemplation (see OW 1, quoted above). This extremely important text tells us that success in contemplation, theology and prayer are completely dependent upon dispassion and humility. The inner monk, says St. Maximos, in total agreement with St. Hesychios, is the only true monk. Dispassion and pure prayer are the mark of the true monk.

Especially noteworthy is the progression: “contemplate, theologize and pray”. This progression is not at all accidental. St. Hesychios here, by quoting St. Maximos, is saying something significant, spiritually advanced and profound. We have been proceeding in our reflections with the underlying assumption that inner prayer leads to contemplation—that, in other words, the gate of contemplation is approached through prayer. But this text shows a progression from contemplation through theology to prayer. Even more noteworthy is this progression when we take into account the fact that both St. Maximos and St. Hesychios, in harmony with the philokalic, ascetic tradition as a whole, understand “theology”, not as rational discourse about God, but as the contemplation of the Holy Trinity that leads to, and itself is, union with God. Prayer, in short, is the alpha and omega of spiritual methods.

25. Archimandrite Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press 1999, p. 138.

26. Isaac, H8, p. 68.

27. St. Hesychios, *On Watchfulness*, p. 147.

28. Theophanes the Monk, *The Ladder of Divine Graces*, *Philokalia*, Vol. 3, p. 67.

29. Isaac, H23, pp. 116-117.

30. *Ibid.*

31. One immediately realizes the utter and profound difference between this understanding of contemplative prayer, and the other notions of “contemplation” and “contemplative prayer” currently in vogue in the Western Christian world, in which being a “contemplative” is a personality trait, and “contemplative prayer” is any mishmash of ideas and practices chosen at the whim of the “contemplative.”



**The Alternation of the Metaphysical Categories
of Masculine and Feminine, Mercy and Wrath,
Essence and Attribute in Relation to the Divine
Names in the Abrahamic Religions**

by Samuel Zinner

Abraham Cohen aptly encapsulates the ancient Jewish paradigm regarding the divine mercy and justice as follows: "In the Rabbinic literature an eternal conflict is represented as being waged between God's justice and mercy."¹ In *Genesis Rabbah* xxxiii.3 we read that the Hebrew word for "God," *Elohim* pertains to judgment, while the divine name *Yahweh* (later rendered with *Adonai*, "Lord") pertains to mercy. In Talmud *Pesahim* 87b God speaks to himself: "May my Mercy prevail over my attribute of justice."² We find similarly in Talmud *Berakot* 7a the prayer, "May thy mercy prevail over thy attribute of justice." Yet another Jewish text expresses this constellation of themes as: "God strengthens his mercy over his anger."³ According to Gershom Scholem, for the holy *Zohar* "the male principle is considered to be the principle of *din* or strict judgment which needs softening and 'sweetening' by the female principle."⁴ In the *Idra Rabba* *Yahweh* corresponds to the divine countenance of Mercy, and *Elohim* corresponds to the divine countenance of judgment. Talmud *Yoma* 54a explains that the two cherubim atop the ark of the covenant (*aron ha-berit*) were male and female respectively.⁵ *Midrash Tadshe* further teaches that the two cherubim represent the names *Yahweh* and *Elohim*.⁶ Talmud *Yoma* 54a states that the two cherubim atop the ark of the covenant were represented as being intertwined in intimate sexual embrace: "R. Kattina said: 'Whenever Israel came up to the Festival, the curtain would be removed for them and the cherubim were shown to them, whose bodies were intertwined with one another, and they would be thus addressed: Look! You

are beloved before God as the love between man and woman.'" Qur'an *sura* 2 refers to these two cherubim in *aya* 248: "And their prophet said to them, Truly a sign of his kingdom (*mulkihii*) is that the ark (of the covenant) will come to you borne by angels (*tahmiluhu al-mala'ikatu*)."

In Kabbalah the static divine Essence as such is contrasted with the dynamic creative divine nature which pertains to infinitude and the sefirotic potencies.⁷ Though the Kabbalists do not always make explicit the following distinction, nevertheless it is the case that God's Mercy in the sense of the divine Essence as such is feminine, whereas by contrast, the divine emanated attribute of mercy may be either feminine or masculine, or a union of the two. In the *Zohar* the emanational mercy can alternate between masculine and feminine categories; acc to I, 232a *Shekhinah* is an angel "who is sometimes male and sometimes female." *Zohar* I:31a: "Psalm 87:5: 'This man and that [man]. . .': 'this man' is *Din* 'and that' is *Rahmamim*. . . ."⁸ Thus the Kabbalists can on occasion write of an equivalence of emanated mercy and wrath.⁹ But strictly speaking the divine Essence is Mercy; thus God is called in Hebrew *Rahmana*, 'The Merciful', and God is both *hannun*, gracious, and *raham*, merciful. In Jewish sources, the divine *hesed*, grace or love, often functions as a synonym for *rahamim*, mercy. *Hesed* and *rahamim* stand opposed to the divine attribute of severity, justice, or wrath, *middath ha-Din*, which according to the *Sefer ha-Bahir* is in fact responsible for the cosmic phenomenon of evil, indeed it is none other than Sa-

tan.¹⁰ Since in Judaism the name *Yahweh* corresponds to Mercy, in distinction to *Elohim* which corresponds to wrath, it is held that *Yahweh* denotes the divine Essence as such, and that all other divine names (including *Elohim*) relate to the divine activity. Kaufmann Kohler and M. Seligsohn comment concerning the great Spanish Kabbalist Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla (1248–ca.1305) who teaches in his esoteric treatise *Ginnat Egoz*, “Nut Orchard,” that “*Yahweh* is the only name which represents the substance of God; the other names are merely predicates of the divine attributes. *Yahweh* stands for God as He is, while *Elohim* denotes God as the creative power.”¹¹ This doctrine concerning *Yahweh* as the *nomen proprium* in contrast to all other divine names as appellatives (*kinnuyim*) is the common Rabbinic as well as Kabbalistic doctrine. Gikatilla writes elsewhere regarding the Tetragrammaton that all other divine names “are allied to it and they are all united in it.”¹² Another medieval Kabbalistic text describes the Tetragrammaton as “the root of all other names” (*Perush Shem ben 'arba Othijoth*).¹³

This Kabbalistic teaching on the Tetragrammaton is based on traditional Jewish theology. We read in Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed* ch. lx1: “It is well known that all the names of God occurring in Scripture are derived from His actions, except one, namely, the Tetragrammaton. . . . This name is applied exclusively to God, and is on that account called *Shem ha-meforash*, ‘The *nomen proprium*’. It is the distinct and exclusive designation of the Divine Being; whilst His other names

are common nouns, and are derived from actions. . . .”¹⁴ As Maimonides explains further: “All other names of God¹⁵ have reference to qualities, and do not signify a simple substance, but a substance with attributes, they being derivatives.” The other names “only indicate the relation of certain actions to Him.”¹⁶ Maimonides supports his argumentation with traditional sources: “In the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* (chap. iii) occurs the following passage: ‘Before the universe was created, there was only the Almighty and His name.’ Observe how clearly the author states that all these appellatives employed as names of God came into existence after the Creation. This is true; for they all refer to actions manifested in the Universe. If, however, you consider his essence as separate and as abstracted from all actions, you will not describe it by an appellative, but by a proper noun, which exclusively indicates that essence. Every other name of God is a derivative, only the Tetragrammaton is a real *nomen proprium*, and must not be considered from any other point of view.”¹⁷ Maimonides concludes this section as follows: “The Tetragrammaton . . . is the only name which indicates nothing but His essence, and therefore our Sages in referring to this sacred term said, ‘My name’ means the one which is peculiar to Me alone.”¹⁸

Thomas Aquinas’ discussion of ‘Lord’ as a divine name is defective because he understands it as the opposite of servant (he shares this in common with the Islamic authors who understand *Rabb* as implying an opposite of servant), thus as ‘Lord’ and not as *Yahweh* (cf. *Summa Theologiae* First

Part Q 13 Art 7, reply Obj 6). In Art 8 Aquinas argues against St. John Damascene's contention that 'God' denotes the activity of God and not the divine Essence by claiming that 'God' can nevertheless be a "name of the nature" because "We name the substance of a thing sometimes from its operation." In Article 9, however, Aquinas writes that "the name 'God' is communicable not in its whole signification, but in some part of it by way of likeness," for *Wisdom* 14:21 refers to "the incommunicable Name." And according to Aquinas "the name Tetragrammaton among the Hebrews" is "in every way incommunicable." The reason for this in Aquinas' judgment is that 'God' signifies the divine nature, whereas the Tetragrammaton of the Hebrews signifies the divine *suppositum*, which for Aquinas means the individual ultimate 'substance'. Accordingly Aquinas writes in Art. 9 Repl Obj 2: "This name 'God' is an appellative name, and not a proper name, for it signifies the divine nature in the possessor. . . ." In Art. 11 Aquinas further argues that 'He Who Is' of *Exodus* 3:13-14 is "the most proper name of God." In Art. 11 Reply Obj 1, Aquinas qualifies his stance: "This name 'He Who Is' is the name of God more properly than this name 'God' both as regards its source, namely being, and as regards the mode of signification and consignification. . . . But as regards the *meaning* intended by the name, this name 'God' is more proper, as it is imposed to signify the divine nature; and still more proper is the Tetragrammaton, because it is imposed to signify the incommunicable and, if one may so speak, singular substance of God."

Before leaving Thomas' analyses of the divine names, we should comment upon his special terminology. *Suppositum* is derived from Aristotle's 'first substance' (*prima substantia*). *Suppositum* is the individual and ultimate subject, and the *supposit* designates the whole, whereas 'nature' designates 'formal part'. In God *suppositum* and nature are identical, whereas in material creatures there is a distinction.¹⁹ For Aquinas 'substance' is equivalent to 'essence' and 'nature' and as person-subject (*suppositum, hypostasis*), that is, as subject-*suppositum* contrasted with quiddity (*quod quid est*), "the nature of a thing."²⁰ Aquinas also makes a distinction between first substance, which is individual subsistence, and second substance, which is the nature of the genus itself. Quiddity is essence-nature, whereas *suppositum* is subject, substance.²¹ In the end, we see that Aquinas in essence agrees with the Jewish perspective on the uniqueness of the Tetragrammaton.

Although Aquinas, in common with other Christian interpreters, does not explore the subject of the divine names *Dominus* and *Deus* with reference to mercy and justice, we should nonetheless briefly allude to some traditional exegeses regarding the latter pair. *Psalms* 25:10 and 145:17 have played a repeated role in these discussions: "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth"; "The Lord is just in all his ways." St. Augustine holds that justice and mercy *in divinis* are inseparable. St. Bernard of Clairvaux teaches that mercy and justice coexist, but that strictly speaking they cannot be mutually integrated, in contrast to St. Anselm's

interpretations. These views are all discussed by Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* I q 27, "On God's Justice and Mercy." As for his own views, rather than absolutely identifying justice and mercy, Aquinas concludes: "The work of divine justice always presupposes the work of mercy and is grounded in it." This joining together, we may even call it a "wedding," of mercy and judgment (justice) is highly reminiscent of Jewish Kabbalistic traditions which interpret the divine mercy and judgment as a syzygy representing the metaphysical feminine and masculine dimensions of God expressed with the image of the sexual union of the two cherubim atop the ark of the covenant, which signifies both the union and the at least functional interchangeability of the feminine name *Yahweh* with the masculine name *Elohom*.²²

In the ancient Christian document known as *Pistis Sophia* (Faith-Wisdom)²³ there is an extended allegorical and metaphysical treatment, reminiscent of Jewish midrashic practices, of *Psalms* 85:10: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." As in the medieval Christian sources, "truth" in this verse is understood as a synonym of "judgment." In I:61 the Virgin Mary interprets the "mercy" of *Psalms* 85 as "the Spirit which hath descended from the height through the First Mystery," and "truth . . . is the power which hath sojourned with me." In I:62 Mary Magdalene similarly interprets "mercy" as the "Divine Spirit."

The Rabbinic and Kabbalistic predominance of Mercy over wrath is perfectly paralleled conceptually and verbally in Islamic sources. We read in a *hadith qudsi*,

for example: "When God created the world, he recorded in his Book what is also written upon the Throne: 'Verily, my mercy prevails over my wrath.'" (Similarly in the New Testament we find: "And mercy exalteth itself above judgment"; *Epistle of James* 2:13). Ibn al-'Arabi expressed himself on the subject: "'Mercy prevails over wrath', for the beginning was established by mercy. Wrath is an accident, and accidents are passing."²⁴ And as the Talmud *Pesahim* 87b has God speak to himself: "May my Mercy prevail over my attribute of justice," so twice in the Qur'an, *sura* 6:12, 54, we read that God has written, i.e., prescribed, to himself Mercy: "He hath prescribed for Himself mercy." *Sura* 7:156 proclaims that God's Mercy is universal: "My mercy embraceth all things."

Intiguously the very first Qur'anic *sura*, *al-Fatiha*, "The Opening," contains a precise parallel to the classic Rabbinic and Kabbalistic description of the contrast between Mercy (*Hesed/Rahamim*) and Wrath (*Din*). *Ayat* 1 and 3 refer to The Merciful and The Compassionate, *al-Rahman, al-Rahim*, and that the divine Mercy prevails over wrath is indicated by the fact that *ayat* 1 and 3 precede the mention in *aya* 4 of "judgment," *din*, the Arabic word agreeing precisely with the Hebrew word *din*. The final *aya*, 7, mentions the bestowal of the divine favor, blessing, or grace (*'an'ama*; the noun form is *ni'mata*), which closely corresponds semantically to Hebrew *hesed*, and only thereafter does a reference to God's wrath (*ghadab*), which more closely than Arabic *din* corresponds in meaning to Hebrew *din* in the sense of severity. The *Fatiha* ends on a note of mercy prevailing over



wrath, for if we read *ghayril maghdubi* rather than *ghayral maghdubi* (both options are found in the traditions), *aya* 7 speaks positively of “those whom you have blessed, upon whom wrath does not rest, and who go not astray,” and not negatively as in most, but certainly not all, translations, “those whom you have blessed, not those upon whom wrath rests, and who go astray.”²⁵ Moreover, the mention of King (*malik*) in *aya* 4 is reminiscent of the important *sefira Malkut* (‘Kingdom’) in the Kabbalah, which is paralleled in the significant role that Arabic *Malakut* plays in Sufi metaphysics. We should mention that the phrase “Lord of the Worlds” (*rabbi-l-'alamin*) in *aya* 2 is a well-known, even quite standard Jewish title for God

which is found throughout ancient and medieval Aramaic and Hebrew literature (Hebrew *בְּמִלּוּעָה יוֹבֵר*), and the Arabic phrase *rabbi-l-'alamin* bears linguistic marks of having perhaps originated from Aramaic (Hebrew *olam* = Aramaic *alma*, plural *almin*). The Jewish term passed into ancient Christian Kabbalistic literature as “the Lord of all the aeons” (see e.g., *Pistis Sophia* I:32, 34). Similarly the Arabic term *al-Rahman* was held among traditional Muslim authorities such as Mubarrad and Tha’lab to have entered Arabic from the Hebrew word *אֲרַמְהָרָה* *Rahmana*, ‘The Merciful’. None of these correspondences between the Qur’an and Judaism should come as a surprise, for the Qur’an presents itself as a confirmation and renewal of the

earlier revelations given through Moses and Jesus.

Given the Qur'an's teaching on the universality of the divine Mercy, it is natural that many traditional Islamic authorities have taught a doctrine of *apokatastasis*, that is, that the punishments of hell are not eternal, and that all will eventually attain beatitude. Ibn al-'Arabi writes, for example: "How is it possible that there be eternal suffering? Far be it from God that his wrath should prevail over his mercy, because he is the Truthful One, or that He should limit his Mercy's embrace after saying it is universal."²⁶ Similarly the same author declares: "How is it possible that punishment be eternal for the damned, seeing that God possesses the quality of universally pervading Mercy? God is too dignified for that."²⁷

Since the Qur'anic revelation was transmitted in Arabic, which is closely related to Hebrew, as is the case with Judaism so does Islam conceive of the divine Mercy as a metaphysically feminine reality. This is founded in the fact that the Arabic word for mercy, *rahma*, which forms the grammatical basis of the divine names *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim* in the first verse of the Qur'an, is etymologically derived from the Arabic word for "womb," namely, *rahm*; the same is the case in Hebrew. In turn the word *rahm* originally meant "mother" or "woman" in general.²⁸ A woman or mother cares for her infant with tenderness, kindness, and mercy, and thus the concrete *rahm* was extended in meaning, leading to the abstract concept of mercy, *rahma*. An Islamic *hadith qudsi* declares that the womb, *rahm*, is named after God's own name *al-Rahman*. This divine name occurs at

the head of 113 of the Qur'an's 114 chapters in a form known as the *Basmallah*: "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." Equivalent phrases in Hebrew and Greek referring to God as merciful, compassionate, or kind are found throughout the Jewish and Christian scriptures,²⁹ but what seems to be unique with regard to the *Basmallah* is that its titles designating the kindness and love of God are both ultimately derived from the word for "womb," *rahm*.³⁰ One could speak of an intensification of a metaphysically feminine component in the *Basmallah*; indeed, one could describe this as a metaphysical *feminization* of the kindness of God.

In light of the "intensified" feminine dimensions, both grammatical and metaphysical, of the *Basmallah*'s two terms *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim*, it would not be surprising to find additional Rabbinic and Kabbalistic analogues in the Qur'an, and we find one such further parallel in the Qur'anic *Sakina* (see e.g., *sura* 2:249), cognate with the Hebrew *Shekhinah*, which in Judaism is understood as a hypostatic manifestation of the divine Presence in feminine mode, usually equated with the Holy Spirit as celestial or supernal Mother (*ruah*, 'Spirit' in Hebrew is grammatically feminine; thus in the Syro-Palestinian *Gospel of the Hebrews* Christ speaks of "My Mother the Holy Spirit"). That the Qur'anic *Sakina* is hypostatic is indicated by Tabari's history of the Prophet's life where it is narrated that two angels implanted in the Prophet's heart the divine *Sakina* in the form of a white cat.³¹ The animal features of *Sakina* can be understood in light of the animal imagery ascribed to the

four cherubim of the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the divine Throne (*merkabah*) in *Ezekiel* chapter 1. Another indication of the hypostatic status of *Sakina* in Islam is the fact that the Jewish tradition of hypostatic *Shekhinah* found in *Pirke Abhoth* 3:7, "Whenever ten are gathered together to study the Torah, the *Shekhinah* lowers herself in their midst," is paralleled in Sahih Muslim 5, 297: "Never does a group meet together in one of the houses of Allah in order to read the book of Allah and study it together but that *Sakina* descends upon them, and mercy covers them, and the angels hover above them." Additionally, in *sura* 43:4 the *umm al-kitab*, the Mother of the Book is assigned two divine Names, '*aliyyun* and '*hakim*, Exalted, Wise, which are clearly assigned to God in several surrounding *suras* (see 39:1; 40:2, 8; 42:51; 45:2; 46:2). In contrast to *sura* 3:7 where the phrase *umm al-kitab* is used in the exegetical sense of "Authority of the Book" (Arabic *umm* here is used in the sense of the Rabbinic Hebrew *em* 'mother' with the meaning 'authority'),³² in *sura* 43:4 the term *umm al-kitab*, because it is assigned two divine Names, must be understood in a quite different sense, namely, as a title for God. The other Qur'anic occurrence of the term *umm al-kitab* is found in *sura* 13:39, where it is usually understood in the sense of "archetype of the Book," but *sura* 43:4 would seem to indicate that a hypostatic archetype is involved here, and not a mere linguistic metaphor.³³ In this case the *umm al-kitab* would correspond to the Kabbalistic *ha-shah ha-'elyonah*, the Supernal Lady, who is none other than the well-known primordial hypostatic Lady Wisdom (Hebrew *Hokhmah*

= Arabic *Hikma*) known from the Jewish scriptures (cf. *Proverbs* 8; *Sirach* 24; *Wisdom* 7; *Baruch* 3-4), who was also seen as the pre-existent hypostatic Torah (in Christian terms, the Logos) who appears on the earthly plane as the written Torah. The western Roman church and the Eastern Orthodox church have interpreted this Lady Wisdom anagogically in scriptural exegesis and in liturgy as referring to the Virgin Mary, but also to Christ. Protestant authorities usually interpret the Lady Wisdom passages as prophecies solely of the incarnation of Christ. In an Islamic context it would be more appropriate to speak of *tajalli* rather than of incarnation. Thus we may describe Mary as an earthly counterpart or analogue of the celestial hypostatic *Hikma*.

Although Islam is a confirmation of the previous revelations given through Moses and Jesus, it is nevertheless also a distinct manifestation on the formal plane of history of the admittedly single transcendent celestial Abrahamic archetype. As a consequence, just as Judaism and Christianity exhibit both continuities and divergences between each other, so we would naturally expect the same to be the case also with regard to Islam in contrast to Judaism and the Church. One of the principle distinctives between Judaism and Islam is a shift with regard to the divine names. Whereas in Judaism *Yahweh* is the divine *nomen proprium*, in Islam the name *Allah* (corresponding to Hebrew *Elohim*) functions as the divine *nomen proprium*. As Frithjof Schuon writes: "The Name *Allah* . . . is the quintessence of all the Qur'anic formulas. . . ."³⁴ This metaphysical transposition, a sort of "shattering of previous forms,"

to use a phrase from Schuon,³⁵ is illustrated by the Qur'an's reversal of divine names in the prayer of Jesus as recorded in *sura Ma'ida* aya 114, which has Jesus open his prayer as follows: *Allahumma Rabbanaa*, "O God, our Lord," which is in fact the precise opposite of what one would expect the historical Jesus to have prayed, for the traditional opening invocation of Jewish prayer is generally "O Lord our God," as in the common opening invocation *Baruch atah Adonai Eloheanu*, "Blessed art Thou O Lord our God."

In one passage of his *al-Futuhat al-makkiyya* Ibn al-'Arabi seems to propose that the three divine names of the Basmallah, namely, Allah, al-Rahman, and al-Rahim, are actually a single name of God. This would not be unprecedented, for in Islam the first part of the Shahadah has similarly been considered a divine Name.³⁶ Ibn al-'Arabi presents this one name as subsisting in a threefold mode: "Although the name 'Allah' encompasses severity, it also encompasses mercy. The names of severity, domination, and sternness which the name 'Allah' consists of are thus counterbalanced one by one by the names of mercy, forgiveness, release, and leniency which it contains within itself. . . . He has configured mercy threefold [or, 'three'], as the non-manifest mercy in the name *Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim*."³⁷ This passage suggests that the name Allah pertains to severity, and that this name also encompasses mercy by virtue of the two merciful names *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim* which accompany the name Allah inseparably in triadic-unitary mode in the *Basmallah*. In essence we have here in this passage a precise parallel to the Rabbinic teach-

ing which identifies the name *Elohim* (= Arabic *Allah*) with the divine attribute of severity (*din*). This severity is counterbalanced, as we detailed above, by the name *Yahweh* which denotes the divine Essence which is Mercy, *Rahmim*, *Hesed*, so that Mercy as Essence prevails over wrath (*din*) as attribute (*middah*).

We may also deduce from this passage that for Ibn al-'Arabi the divine names and the divine Mercy and judgment are in one sense inseparable and thus in certain modalities interchangeable or interpenetrative. This would agree with Christian patristic stances, as well as with Jewish Kabbalistic traditions. For example, Philo writes, apparently with reference to *Yahweh* and *Elohim*, or in Philo's Greek, *Kyrios* and *Theos* (= Latin *Dominus* and *Deus*), of "the eternal juxtaposition of the [divine] names" (*Questiones et Solutiones in Exodus* II, 66).³⁸ For Rabad the attributes of mercy and judgment alternate "in order to indicate that the actions of the two attributes are not separate."³⁹ Rabad additionally reverses the names associated with the attributes, making the letters *yod* and *he* of *Yahweh* refer to judgment and *Elohim* to mercy, so "that the correlation between the divine names and attributes are interchangeable."⁴⁰ Rabbi Meir writes as follows within the same paradigm: "For behold the Tertagrammaton comes out of his place. He comes out of it from one attribute of mercy to another attribute, from out of the attribute of judgment to the attribute of mercy."⁴¹

In Islam, while the two names Allah and *al-Rahman* are not identical, nevertheless they are metaphysically correlated inseparably; this is indicated



by *sura* 17:110: Call on God or call on the Merciful; howsoever ye invoke Him, it is well, for to Him belong the most excellent Names." With reference to the *Basmallah*, Frithjof Schuon deduces from *sura* 17:110 that "*Rahmah* is not therefore one Quality amongst others, it is the internal radiation of the *Dhat*, of the very Essence."⁴² Mercy cannot be a mere attribute equivalent to all the other divine attributes known in Islam, for in fact *al-Rahman* in the *Basmallah* does not refer to a divine attribute, but to the divine Essence. As Schuon explains in the same passage, *al-Rahim* is the first of the divine "Qualities (*Sifat*)."⁴³ Therefore *al-Rahim* signifies the first divine attribute; this is because whereas *al-Rahman* pertains to the Essence of Mercy, *al-Rahim* pertains to God's merciful activity.

Schuon's profound reflections regarding the essential status of *al-Rahman* and the qualitative status implied in the name *al-Rahim* makes intelligible a teaching of Ibn al-'Arabi concerning the divine names. Rather than holding that the three divine names of the *Basmallah* are the primary names of God, Ibn al-'Arabi teaches instead that after *Allah* and *al-Rahman*, it is *al-Rabb*, rather than *al-Rahim*, that stands among the three primary divine names in the Islamic revelation. This makes sense in the light of the traditional Jewish teaching that sees in *Yahweh*, or *Adonai*, which is the Hebrew equivalent of the Arabic term *al-Rabb*, the divine Essence which is Mercy. Reynold Nicholson comments of Ibn al-'Arabi's *Tarjuman al-ashwaq*: "In a noteworthy passage (xii, 4) Ibn al-'Arabi seeks to harmonize Islam with Christianity. The Christian Trinity, he says, is essentially a Unity which has its counterpart in the three cardinal Names whereby God is signified in the Qur'an, viz. *Allah*, *al-Rahman*, and *al-Rabb*."⁴³ The passage from Ibn al-'Arabi reads as follows: "He says, 'Number does not beget multiplicity in the Divine substance, as the Christians declare that the Three Persons of the Trinity are One God, and as the Qur'an declares (xvii, 110): 'Call on God or call on the Merciful; howsoever ye invoke Him, it is well, for to Him belong the most excellent Names.' The cardinal Names in the Qur'an are three, viz. *Allah* and *al-Rahman* and *al-Rabb*, by which One God is signified, and the rest of the Names serve as epithets of those three."⁴⁴

According to Ibn al-'Arabi, Nicolas of Cusa, and Frithjof Schuon, the different religions represent in fact separate

worlds, even distinct solar systems.⁴⁵ Given that the different religions constitute different worlds, it comes as no surprise that these different worlds have been given different names for the divine Reality. On a purely metaphysical level, this tension is resolved by an apophatic approach to the question, such as is found in the *Zohar*, which teaches, in the words of Gershom Scholem, “that the *deus absconditus* is nameless.”⁴⁶ A similar trajectory is implied in Islam by the esoteric traditions on the *al-ism al-a’zam*, the Supreme Name, which in the words of Jean Canteins is an “unknown and secret Name. . . .”⁴⁷ According to Juwayria, as recorded in Saffar al-Qummi’s *Basa’ir al-darajat* 5:2, the *al-ism al-a’zam* or *al-ism al-akbar* is Syriac or Hebrew (*suryani aw ‘ibrani*). It is elsewhere said to consist of 73 letters; 72 letters were given to Muhammad, and one letter, the final, is kept secret with God.⁴⁸ These traditions transparently coincide with the Jewish esoteric traditions concerning the secret name of God which consists of 72 letters in Hebrew.⁴⁹ By adding a 73rd letter, Islamic tradition suggests that ultimately there is no word which can fully circumscribe the divine Reality as such.

This ultimately apophatic emphasis with regard to the Supreme Name is also encountered in the metaphysics of Shaykh al-‘Alawi.⁵⁰ This authority writes, for example: “Invocation is the veil of the remembered one. The name is the veil of the Named one.”⁵¹ In a similar passage we read: “Remembrance was required before entering upon Allah and sitting with Him, but it is a means of ascent in unity when one is traveling towards Allah, not when

one is sitting with Allah. And how could one search for the name if one has found the named? The end of remembrance is the witnessing of the Remembered.”⁵² Shaykh al-‘Alawi continues as follows: “Would anyone repeat the name of the King, while he looked at the King? The name is the guide to the Named, and it is used when the Named is absent. When the Named is present, He makes you independent of the Name.”⁵³ Another representative statement is formulated as follows: “Where is knowledge and where are attributes, and where is the Name? No, by Allah—there is nothing except Allah—nothing except the essence that has encompassed all these manifestations.”⁵⁴ In a final section, Shaykh al-‘Alawi speaks of three stages of *dikhr*: “Invocation has three degrees. The invocation of the tongue, the invocation of the heart and the invocation of the core. So the invocation of the murid is by tongue, then by heart, and this is done through a guide, then by core, or we say, by the secret. This is the pinnacle. Then he withdraws from invocation in order to witness the Invoked.”⁵⁵

Shaykh al-‘Alawi’s metaphysics in relation to the Name and invocation are by no means an innovation, for Imam Al-Ghazzali similarly teaches in the fourth book of his *Ihya ulum-id-din*, in the chapter on *tawakkul* that there are three categories of those who are reliant upon God. The penultimate stage is reached by the one whose “condition is like that of an infant who knows nobody except his mother. . . . When any danger comes to him . . . , the first word he utters is ‘O mother’. Such a God-reliant man relies on God as a child relies on his mother.” But the highest class is

that of one who “is like that child who knows that wherever he will stay, his mother will find him. . . . Such a person gives up invocation because he trusts in God’s Mercy. . . .”⁵⁶

Shaykh al-‘Alawi’s and Imam al-Ghazzali’s teachings quoted above must not be misunderstood as implying that the faithful may abandon prayer or invocation. To understand their teachings correctly, we can remind the reader that the pinnacle of prayer described in these two Muslim authors is paralleled in Christianity by what is known as the silent “prayer of the mystical marriage” or “prayer of the mystical union,” as it is variously called in Catholic theology. As the traditional Christian authorities teach, upon occasion when one is praying the rosary or invoking God aloud, when God so wills, the person praying is then lifted to a higher form of prayer, a silent state in which all outward forms of prayer and invocation must cease, an in which the soul passes away in the death of the *unio mystica*. In this state, as St. Teresa of Avila expresses it, “It is God Who is the soul of that soul.”⁵⁷ Contrary to a widespread prejudice, the same transcendent prayer state of mystical union is also known in Judaism. For Judaism, *unio mystica* follows the stages of *devekut* (‘cleaving’) and mystical annihilation (*bittulam* = Arabic *fana’*) of the self.⁵⁸ In this state of union, Rabbi Nahman says of the one praying that “his prayer is the Prayer of God himself.”⁵⁹ Such silent, non-invocatory states are not permanent, so that there is no contradiction between the two Islamic *ahadith* of the Prophet Muhammad: “Let your mouth be wet with the remembrance of God” and

“The one who knows God, his tongue is paralyzed.”⁶⁰

When examining the various modulating interconnections (as well as distinctives) which exist between the divine Names at varying metaphysical and theological levels in the different revelations, it is vital to bear in mind that the metaphysical plane must not be confused with the theological and invocatory domains. Thus when one encounters a possible metaphysical correspondence between divine Names in Jewish and Islamic traditions, one’s intention must not be to fuse these traditions together into a single spiritual method, as if a Jew could view the name Elohim (= Allah) as the nomen proprium Dei, or as if a Muslim could view al-Rabb as the name of God as such. On the contrary, there is no question of any intermingling of such traditions on a formal level of theology or of spiritual practice. When undertaking a metaphysical analysis of the various revelations, the intention must be to present a strictly metaphysical explication of the realities lying behind the esoteric languages and symbolisms of, for example, Jewish Kabbalism and Islamic Sufism. Jewish Kabbalists will rightly continue to be attached to the priority of the name Lord (Adonai, YHWH) in their speculative and invocatory practices, while Sufis will continue to be attached to the priority of the name Allah in their speculations and invocatory practices. When we compare the Jewish and Islamic traditions on the divine nomen proprium and other appellatives, we are therefore engaging in a metaphysical explication of the realities underlying such Names, and in no sense presenting a case for changing

any tradition's invocatory practice or formal metaphysical or theological paradigms. Esoterism as such transcends attachments to the specific language of any formal religious or even mystical system, and esoterism itself can all too often be reduced to the level of the dogmatic as a sort of "exo-esoterism"⁶¹ when it is wedded unreflectively or volitively to a concrete religious spiritual path. The fact that a Sufi invokes the name Allah as the name of God as such cannot cancel out the rightness of a Kabbalist who views the name Yahweh as the name of God as such. Both are right, from their respective and from the different angles of their divinely sanctioned views.

Alongside apophatic insights concerning the divine Names, it must not be forgotten that even though there is a metaphysical distinction that can be made between the Named and the Name, the fact is that the divine Names are not merely appellatives or conventional signs, but as Frithjof Schuon teaches, they are truly sacramental in nature and essence, for the divine Names participate in and communicate to the invoker the divine Reality. Thus all divine Names of God in a certain

sense are designations of the divine Reality both *secundum dici*, according to speech (as appellatives-*kinnuyim*), and *secundum esse*, according to being or essence, a point that Aquinas makes in his *Summa theologiae*. And as Buddhist Amidism emphasizes, in the final dark ages salvation has been mercifully simplified by means of simple invocation. Frithjof Schuon expresses the sacramental nature of the divine names with reference to Islam and Buddhism, and it is to this magisterial sage that we give the final word: "There is necessarily a guarantee of efficacy in the Divine Names themselves. . . . Thus, if the *Shahadah* comprises the same grace as the Original Vow of Amida, it is by virtue of its content: because it is the supreme formulation of Truth and because Truth delivers by its very nature. Now the *Shahadah* is nothing other than an exteriorization in doctrinal form of the Name *Allah*; it corresponds strictly to the *Ehieh asher Ehieh* of the Burning Bush in the Torah. It is by such formulas that God announces 'Who He Is', and thus what His Name signifies; and it is for this reason that such formulas, or such *mantrams*, are so many Names of God."⁶²

NOTES

1. Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud. The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages* (NY: Schocken Books, 1995), 17.
2. For these references, cf. *Ibid.*, 17ff.
3. Cited in Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead. Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*. Tr. from the German by Joachim Neugroschel (NY: Schocken Books, 1991), 90.
4. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (NY: Meridian, 1974), 116-17.
5. Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives* (New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1988), 130.

6. Ibid., 130-31.
7. See Scholem, *Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 159.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 52.
10. Scholem, *Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 63.
11. Jewish Encyclopedia.
12. Scholem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of Kabbalah," *Diogenes* (1972), 179.
13. Ms. Florence, Plut. II, cod. 41 (of 1328), fol. 198; cf. Scholem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of Kabbalah," 168.
14. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Translated by M. Friedlander (NY: Dover, 1956), 89.
15. For Maimonides, these "other names" include *Elohim*, which he takes to mean 'chief' or 'prince' (cf. *ibid.*, 90); the name *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*, "I am who I am" ('He Who Is') is derived from *hayah*, 'existing'. "Jah likewise implies eternal existence"; "all these names of God are appellatives or are applied to God by way of homonymy" (cf. *ibid.*, 94-95).
16. Ibid., 90.
17. Ibid., 90-91.
18. Ibid., 91.
19. John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas. From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 238-40.
20. Ibid., 203-04.
21. Ibid., 207-08.
22. Cf. Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, 128-36.
23. *Pistis Sophia* is generally described as a classical "Gnostic" document. A more accurate assessment would categorize it as a Christian Kabbalistic work. The very title of the work, *Faith Wisdom*, reflects the Jewish Kabbalistic identification of '*Emunah*' ('faith') with *Hokhmah* ('wisdom') found in works such as *Sefer ha-'Iyyun* and *Ma'yan ha-Hokhmah*; cf. Mark Verman, *The Books of Contemplation. Medieval Jewish Mystical Texts: Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 42, 133. Moreover, the parallels between the *Pistis Sophia* document and traditional orthodox Jewish Kabbalistic writings have long been recognized by scholarship; see e.g., *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch*. Tr. by Hugo Odeberg (London: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 34, 82, 122-23, 141, 168-69, 188-92.
24. Ibn al-'Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-makkiyya* (Cairo, 1911), vol. IV, 405, 7.
25. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem translates this phrase as "those who incur no anger," and astutely comments that "the verb here is not attributed to God." Cf. *The Qur'an. A new translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.
26. Ibn al-'Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-makkiyya* (Cairo, 1911), vol. III 466, 20.
27. Ibid., 25, 19.

28. See A. Ben-Shemesh, "Some Suggestions to Qur'an Translators," *Arabica* vol. 16 (1969), 83ff.
29. *Exodus* 34:6: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and compassionate. . . ."; *Psalms* 103:8: "The Lord is merciful and compassionate." *Psalms* 145:8: "The Lord is merciful and compassionate." *Sirach* 2:11: "For the Lord is merciful and compassionate." *Jonah* 4:2: ". . . You are a merciful God and compassionate." In the New Testament, the *Epistle of James* 5:11 continues this traditional language: ". . . the Lord is merciful and compassionate."
30. There is a distinction to be made here; metaphysically the womb is named after *al-Rahman*; linguistically, however, the two abstract words *al-rahma* and *al-Rahman* are derived from the concrete word 'womb', *rahm*.
31. We are reminded of the Prophet's tender fondness for cats, as well as his bestowal of the name 'Abu Hurayra' ("Father of the Little Female Cat") upon one of his Companions.
32. Cf. W. Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur*, vol 1 (Leipzig, 1899), 119-21; L. Zunz, *Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden* (Frankfurt, 1892), 338.
33. Consider Ibn al-'Arabi's divine statement: "'My Book is nothing other than My Essence'" (*Al-Futuhat al-makkiyya* ch. 411).
34. Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1994), 150.
35. See Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest, 1984), 31.
36. See Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, 151.
37. Ibn al-'Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-makkiyya* (Cairo, 1911), vol. III, 9, 24.
38. Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, 132, 339.
39. *Ibid.*, 129-30.
40. *Ibid.*, 133-34.
41. *Ibid.*, 134.
42. This is from an unpublished text numbered 576, "The Enigma of the Basmallah."
43. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Tarjuman al-ashwaq. A Collection of Mystical Odes by Muhyi' d-din Ibn al-'Arabi* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911), vi.
44. *Ibid.*, 71.
45. On this model see on Ibn al-'Arabi: Reza Shah-Kazemi, "The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue: Sufi Perspectives on the Universality of the Qur'anic Message," in James S. Cutsinger, ed., *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2002), 181. On Nicolas of Cusa's model, see: Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*. Translated by Mario Domandi (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), 28, 30-31, 36. On Frithjof Schuon's paradigm, see his *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 28.
46. Scholem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of Kabbalah," 175.
47. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality. Manifestations* (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1997), 460, 467.

48. See Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism. The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*. Tr. by David Streight (Albany, New York: SUNY, 1994), 92-93; 207.

49. For references see *The Zohar*. Pritzker Edition. Vol. 1. Tr. by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), 48.

50. See Shaykh al-'Alawi, *Knowledge of God. A sufic commentary on al Murshid al-Mu'in of ibn al-'Ashir*. Edited by 'Abd as-Sabur al-Ustadh; translated by 'Abd al-Kabir al-Munawarra and 'Abd as-Sabur al-Ustadh (Norfolk, UK: Diwan Press, 1981), 152, 173-74, 236, 320, 329, 364, 378.

51. *Ibid.*, 152.

52. *Ibid.*, 173-74.

53. *Ibid.*, 174.

54. *Ibid.*, 236.

55. *Ibid.*, 378.

56. Cf. Imam Ghazzali, *Ihya ulum-id-din. The Book of Religious Learnings*. Vol. 4. Tr. by Al-Haj Maulana Fazlul Karim (New Delhi, India: Abdul Naeem/Islamic Book Service, 1991), 226-27.

57. On the various grades of the highest levels of prayer according to Christian theology, see: John G. Arinterro, *The Mystical Evolution in the Development and Vitality of the Church*. Translated by Jordan Aumann. 2 vols. (Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books, 1978).

58. Cf. the comments of Moshe Idel in Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn, *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 34.

59. *Ibid.*, 45.

60. The second *hadith* is cited in Shaykh al-'Alawi, *Knowledge of God*, 175, which is quoted after the observation: "The one who remembers is the companion Allah. If the essence was revealed to him, he would not say 'Allah, Allah'. He would stop or he would disintegrate."

61. On the phenomenon of such exo-esoteric displacement, cf. Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2006), 17-42.

62. Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, 151.



Reviews

Review of 2011 Building Bridges Seminar at Georgetown University, Doha, Qatar

From 16-19 May 2011 the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar hosted the 10th of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Building Bridges seminars for Muslim and Christian scholars. The seminar was supported generously by His Highness the Amir of the State of Qatar.

Since the first seminar, in January 2002, Building Bridges has developed its own distinctive approach to Muslim-Christian dialogue, stressing theological dialogue based on the study of scriptural texts. The aim has not been to achieve immediately demonstrable results but rather to nurture a long-term conversation on key issues at the heart of both faiths. Areas of both agreement and difference are explored with equal openness and without pressure to attain consensus. Frank discussion is made possible by the relatively small scale, with some 30 scholars taking part and spending most of the seminar in private sessions, mainly in small groups of around eight. A number of participants have returned year after year, thus creating a committed core group which brings a valuable sense of community and continuity.

The themes of earlier Building Bridges seminars have included scripture, prophecy, the common good, justice and rights, understandings of humanity, approaches to interpretation, science and religion, and the relationship between tradition and modernity. Volumes recording proceedings of the first six seminars have been published and more are in production – see the Building Bridges website (details below) for further information. The theme of the recent seminar was “Prayer: Christian and Muslim Perspectives”, which naturally engaged participants not just as academics but also as believers. Throughout the seminar we were dealing not just with a history of ideas but with practices at the heart of our lives and of our communities.

The seminar was launched on the evening of Monday 16 May, with Professor Judith Tucker hosting proceedings on behalf of Georgetown. Speeches were given by Professor Aisha Youssef al-Mannai, Dean of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, Qatar University, and by Bishop Michael Lewis of the Anglican Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf, representing the local churches. Dr Ibrahim al-Na’imi made a presentation on the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, including a video illustrating its work. Finally, Archbishop Rowan Williams paid tribute to the key role played by Qatar in encouraging dialogue, notably through the work of DICID. Introducing this seminar’s theme, he said that to pray is to be in touch with our deepest nature and our destiny; by reflecting on prayer we reflect on what it

means to be related to the Creator. The theme of prayer is thus linked to all the other themes explored by Building Bridges.

On Tuesday 17 May public lectures were given by seminar participants in three sessions, focusing on "Theology of Prayer", "Prayer in Practice", and "Mutual Perceptions". In each case two lectures were given, one by a Christian and one by a Muslim. In the first session, Michael Plekon introduced us to the voices of a number of "persons of prayer". From his own Orthodox tradition, he referred to St Seraphim of Sarov, Paul Evdokimov, and Mother Maria Skobtsova, especially emphasizing that the life of faith must involve "an engagement with all the wonders and horrors" of today's world and that "prayer has as much to do with the neighbour – our sister or brother – as with God and with ourselves". Plekon also quoted extensively from Thomas Merton, noting his correspondence about Sufism with Abdul Aziz. Foundational to Reza Shah-Kazemi's lecture on a Qur'anic theology of prayer was the theme of the knowledge of God. Referring to the hadith in which God says "I was a hidden treasure and I willed to be known," Shah-Kazemi argued that "worship becomes the primary means by which the divine purpose of creation is achieved, and by which knowledge of God ... is attained". Furthermore, God "knows Himself through us in the very measure of our self-effacement [*fana'*]" . Other themes woven into his discussion were the vision of God, *dhikr* (the invocation of the name of God), the theurgic power of the name of God, gratitude, and loving emulation of the Prophet. Topics touched on in the following discussion included silence in prayer, the social implications of prayer, and how Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabi are regarded by Muslims today.

In the second session Philip Sheldrake and Dheen Mohamed addressed the practice of prayer in Christianity and Islam respectively. After introductory comments on the relationship between prayer and theology, Sheldrake, speaking out of the Western Catholic tradition, surveyed six styles of prayer: common prayer, whether spontaneous or formalized in liturgical worship; *lectio divina*, the prayerful reading of scripture; unceasing prayer, as in the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner"); popular devotions, encompassing shrines, pilgrimages, outdoor dramas, and religious art; meditation, both in mediaeval and modern forms; and informal, conversational prayer. He gave a more extended account of one particular spiritual tradition, Ignatian prayer. Concluding comments touched on locations for prayer and the experience of men and women in prayer. Dheen Mohamed began by distinguishing between *salat*, *du'a'*, and *dhikr*, explaining the basis of each in the Qur'an and hadith and noting that *dhikr* is "the very purpose" of *salat* and is "in one sense the supreme form of prayer". After some discussion of Sufi approaches, the lecture concluded with some comments on the negative impact of modernity and puritanical reform movements on Muslim prayer, particularly in Dheen Mohamed's native Sri Lanka. Questions raised included: whether modernity and puritanism are two aspects of the same phenomenon; differing Muslim and

Christian attitudes towards the possibility of protest or challenging God in prayer; and whether Muslims and Christians can pray together with integrity.

In the third session Caner Dagli offered a Muslim response to Christian prayer. He suggested that the Qur'an presents a "nuanced and complex" picture of Christianity in the Qur'an; it generally "praises Christians in their devotion to God, while ... condemning them for their theology". He discussed the Christian understanding of sacraments, arguing that there is perhaps more in common with the Muslim understanding of the five pillars than is usually imagined. Turning to the Lord's Prayer, Dagli focused on how to understand "Father" and the relationship between the petition for forgiveness and Christian thought on atonement. The final section responded to the links between Christian prayer and Trinitarian theology. Daniel Madigan gave the complementary lecture, a Christian perspective on Muslim prayer. He contrasted the rich physical expressiveness of Islamic worship with a Christian tendency to let word eclipse gesture; he also compared Islam's sense of lay responsibility with the dependence of Catholic Christianity on priestly ministry. Madigan noted the "robust masculinity" and the naturally public nature of Muslim worship, while also mentioning "the relegation of women to a position out of sight". His lecture, which also touched on memory (*anamnesis*, *dhikr*) and on Muslims and Christians praying together, concluded with reflections drawn from the poetry of George Herbert ("Love bade me welcome ...") on the essence of the Christian experience of prayer. In the following discussion questions were asked about Muslim and Christian understandings of grace and of the place of Mary; there was also further exploration of the themes of sacramentality and the Trinity.

In a short concluding address Archbishop Williams drew out five key words from the day's proceedings. (1) Friendship. What does it mean to be a friend of God (as in Abraham's name *khalil Allah*)? (2) Knowledge. Traditional understandings conceive of knowledge as involving participation (rather than just acquiring information); modernity and puritanism tend to be impatient with such an understanding. (3) Desire. While there is a proper religious critique of a "mercantile" approach to prayer, is there also a positive account of spiritual desire as a continually expanding openness to God? (4) Protest. Submission to God can be a process within which, at times, discontent, anger, and bewilderment may need to be expressed in order to attain a full submission (as in the "achieved submission" narrated in George Herbert's "The Collar"). (5) Unity. The unity of God is not that of one thing, with an edge round it. The unity with God to which we can aspire is neither to be one thing with God, nor simply to achieve a distant agreement with God. Christian Trinitarian thought seeks to address such questions related to how we understand unity.

The second and third days of the seminar consisted of private sessions divided between plenary addresses and discussion in small groups. On Wednesday 18 May the focus was on "Scripture and Prayer". Presentations by Susan Eastman and Rkia Elraoui Cornell (delivered in her absence) introduced key themes of the Lord's Prayer and *al-Fatiha*, while Philip Seddon and Asma Asfaruddin spoke respectively on Ro-

mans chapter 8 and Qur'an 3:190-194 and 29:45. In the following discussions topics covered included: how we understand the words we use to address God (such as "Father", for Christians); the divine attributes (*sifat*) and the extent to which these can be taken on and manifested by humans; the relationship between theology and prayer (as in Romans 8); remembrance/*dhikr*; intention/*niyya*; listening as a devotional exercise; God as the source of prayer; the distinction between public and private prayer and the balance between these in the believer's life.

The theme running through the seminar's final day, Thursday 19 May, was "Teaching Prayer". Lucy Gardner and Ibrahim Mogra spoke about how Christians and Muslims are taught to pray, with particular reference to childhood formation, and Timothy Wright and Timothy Gianotti addressed "Growth in Prayer", methods and disciplines adopted by those seeking to develop deeper lives of prayer. Themes emerging in the following discussions included: fear and love as motivations to pray; Islamic prayer in Arabic and in vernacular languages; acknowledging struggles in prayer; the role of spiritual guides; electronic media and their impact on prayer; and much more ...

It has been possible here to give only a brief impression of the scope and depth of the conversations that unfolded over the days of this seminar, within an atmosphere of openness that had been encouraged by the circulation before the seminar of personal reflections on prayer written by each participant. As at all Building Bridges seminars, discussion moved naturally between commonalities and areas of difference, including differences not just between Islam and Christianity but also between different traditions within each faith. Joint Christian-Muslim prayer was not organised, but there were opportunities for Christians to attend Muslim devotions and vice versa, which greatly enriched our discussions. As Archbishop Williams had suggested at the seminar's launch, reflecting together on prayer led us into many of the deepest questions in the two faiths and left us with much to go on talking about. So it was natural that the final plenary discussion yielded an extraordinarily long agenda for further Building Bridges seminars.

Georgetown University Press has in recent years published a number of volumes on past Building Bridges seminars, with more forthcoming, and it is hoped that a record of this most recent seminar will soon be added to this series. For details, see the GUP website and the Building Bridges website, hosted by Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs:

<http://www.press.georgetown.edu/>

http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/networks/building_bridges

David Marshall, Academic Director of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Building Bridges Seminar & Research Fellow, the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University

Book Review

Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships. Ed. Philip A. Cunningham, Joseph Sievers, Mary Boys, Hans Hermann Henrix, and Jesper Svartvik. Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. and Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011. Pp. xxxii + 302.

This excellent and thought-provoking volume arises from the profound transformation in the relationships between Catholics and Jews in recent decades. After the Second World War and the horrors of the Shoah (the Holocaust), many Christian communions, including the Catholic Church, undertook a thorough reexamination and revision of their traditionally hostile attitudes toward Judaism and the Jewish people. In 1965 the Second Vatican Council issued the landmark *Declaration on the Relation of the Catholic Church to Non-Christian Religions*, commonly known by its Latin title, *Nostra Aetate* ("In Our Age"), which expressed an attitude of respect for other religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. In 1974, Pope Paul VI established the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with Jews to develop Catholic-Jewish relations. In recent years, at the suggestion of this Commission, a working group of Christian and Jewish scholars has discussed the historical and theological issues involved in the transformed relationship. *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today* presents the fruits of these discussions. In each section of this book, two or more Christian scholars reflect on a particular issue and a Jewish scholar responds. The authors make no pretense that Christians and Jews can agree on all issues or that there is any prospect of resolving theological differences in the foreseeable future. Instead, there is a shared recognition of the profound, positive transformation underway in recent years, and a common interest in understanding and developing this process. While Christianity's theological relationship with Islam is not under discussion in this volume, these essays contain manifold implications for rethinking Christian relations with Muslims as well.

A number of issues have historically troubled Jewish-Christian relations, beginning with Christian interpretations of the New Testament and culminating in the disputed question of Christianity's relation to the Holocaust. Arguably, the single greatest factor exacerbating Jewish-Christian relations was the accusation of "deicide," the attempted murder of God, allegedly willed by the Jewish people in the crucifixion of Jesus. According to the gospel of Matthew, when the Roman governor Pontius Pilate declined responsibility for ordering Jesus' death, the Jewish crowd exclaimed, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mt 27:25); for centuries Christians recalled this scene, frequently blaming all Jews for Jesus' death, and often

attacking Jewish communities, especially in the context of Holy Week commemorations of the crucifixion of Jesus.

John T. Pawlikowski and Mary C. Boys, both American Catholic scholars with great experience in interactions with Jews, review the long, bitter history of Jewish-Christian relations from the changed vantage-point of the present. Pawlikowski rightly rejects any direct causal link between classical Christian attitudes towards Jews and the Holocaust: "Clearly the Nazi program depended on modern philosophy and pseudo-scientific racist theories" (p. 22). Nonetheless, like many scholars, he acknowledges the indirect role of Christian anti-Semitism in shaping the background of the Nazi atrocities: "But we cannot obfuscate the fact that traditional Christianity provided an indispensable seedbed for the widespread support, or at least acquiescence, on the part of large numbers of baptized Christians during the Nazi attack on the Jews" (p. 22). Given this stark admission, Pawlikowski sets forth the challenge to rethink Christian theology in light of human rights, insisting that "any authentic notion of ecclesiology after the experience of the Holocaust must make human rights a central component" (p. 25). In a similar vein, Boys recalls that the accusation of Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death was central to traditional Christian rhetoric, and she laments the failure of the Second Vatican Council to acknowledge forthrightly this fact and the suffering that resulted to Jews. Boys notes that in the later Christian imagination Judas became the archetypal image for the Jews, that the violence of the Crusades frequently targeted Jews, and that the long history of condemnations of Jews was a factor in the background of the Holocaust. Boys proposes creative interpretative strategies for wrestling with difficult texts, including the scriptures; these approaches center on the principles of evangelical justice and charity and acknowledge frankly the limitations of the human authors of biblical texts.

Somewhat paradoxically, Jewish scholar Marc Saperstein responds to Pawlikowski and Boys by tempering the laments of the two Catholic scholars and noting the importance of examining one's expectations when evaluating earlier historical periods. Saperstein, who has long studied and taught the history of Jewish-Christian relations, acknowledges that if we start from post-Enlightenment norms of religious tolerance, mutual acceptance, and respect, then we will be appalled by pre-modern Catholic attitudes of interreligious hostility and violence toward Jews. However, he asserts, "if we start with a somewhat more pessimistic assumption—that the default pattern is one of competition, tension, resentment, antipathy, hostility—an assumption that appears to be validated not only by the realm of nature but by the empirical evidence of our own time, then we might marvel more at the reality of coexistence when it appears" (p. 70). Despite the long history of Christian mistreatment of Jews, Saperstein notes that Christians viewed Jewish survival as directly willed by God and that Pope Clement VI forcefully forbade attacks on Jews during the Black Death. Where Jewish historian Daniel Goldhagen harshly accuses the Catholic Church of active involvement in Nazi crimes against the Jews, Saperstein

sharply dismisses Goldhagen's indictment as "in my judgment a diatribe that no fair-minded reader can find remotely persuasive" (p. 73). Saperstein does not see Christian attitudes toward Jews as in any way a necessary background to the Nazi atrocities, noting that other totalitarian regimes have performed similar atrocities without such prerequisites.

The interpretation of the New Testament plays a major role in Jewish-Christian discussions; today scholars increasingly read these texts as Jewish texts in the context of first-century Jewish debates. Recent scholarship has devoted much attention to the so-called "parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity, with many scholars calling into question any early dating of this development. In light of this research, Daniel Harrington explores the development of the early Christian movement within Judaism, placing the negative statements about Jews in the New Testament in the context of first-century Jewish polemics. He also notes developments in the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians that point the way toward the Christian church moving into the Gentile world beyond the boundaries of Judaism.

Christians have often understood the Epistle to the Hebrews as teaching supersessionism, i.e., the belief that Christianity has superseded Judaism and the Old Covenant that God made with the Jewish people has been replaced by the New Covenant with Christians. New Testament scholar Jesper Svartvik offers a careful reading of the text, rebutting the traditional understanding.

Other scholars explore the significance of the Jewishness of Jesus. Most traditional Christian theology did not reflect on this question and saw Jesus as simply becoming a human being in abstraction from his Jewish identity. As Hans Hermann Henrix points out, the specifically Jewish background of Jesus' teachings had no importance for the noted Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, who had commented that "the Jewish origin in Jesus is of no interest for Christians today" (p. 119). In sharp disagreement with Rahner, Henrix insists that Jesus "became Jewish flesh, a Jew, the son of a Jewish mother and as *such* a concrete human being" (119).

The authors do not reflect upon the implications of these discussions for Christians' relations with the Muslim community. Nonetheless, the more one roots Jesus in his original Jewish context and sees him as developing the prophetic heritage of ancient Judaism, the closer Jesus comes to some aspects of traditional Muslim perspectives on him. As Christians revisit and revise traditional attitudes towards Jews, they are challenged to undertake similar reflections regarding Muslims. Perhaps more important than any conclusions drawn in this volume are the relationships reflected and strengthened in the dialogical model of scholarship. Such frank discussions would have been difficult or impossible in many settings in the past; they can offer a challenge and stimulus to Christian conversations with all other religious traditions.

Reviewed by Leo D. Lefebure, Matteo Ricci, S.J. Professor of Theology
Georgetown University

Book Review

Roy Rappaport, Religion and Ritual in the making of Humanity, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 535 pages.

Roy Rappaport sets his aim in this book to enlarge our understanding of the nature of religion and of religion in nature. He seeks what is true in all religions and the special character of truth that is in the nature of religions to claim. His central argument is that 'in the absence of ... religion, humanity could not have emerged from its pre- or proto-human condition' (p.1). Religious concepts are claimed to have an 'adaptive significance' and are generated through ritual (p.2). He gives us historical and ethnographic accounts ranging from his work among the Maring speakers of New Guinea to ancient Judaism, early Christianity, recent developments in "modernizing" world religions, and finally biblical accounts that relate the past to the New Age. The arguments include an eclectic range of readings in philosophy, religious studies, psychology, ecology, and much more besides.

Ritual is defined loosely in terms of tradition, formality and invariance. Ritual, it is argued, may have played a crucial evolutionary role in intensifying the complex, reciprocal relationships of mutual trust that symbolic communication and social action presuppose. Its principle aspects are discursive and non discursive to which Rappaport gives the terms sacred and numinous. The object of the "sacred" discourse is the divine, the "numinous" is the non-verbal experience of ritual. Taken together these two parts form the "Holy", a term cognate with the whole and health. Religion is the way humans approach the integration of life and world, and ritual is the most common means of doing so. For Rappaport the individual and the everyday are as central to religion as the collective and the extraordinary. Ritual by emphasizing formality provides the ground for their effective synthesis in the experience of the Holy.

In a state of spiritual ecstasy in ritual we internalize, argues Rappaport, the lessons which bind us to each other in social life, which is an apt description of the socialization process. Ritual consists of more or less invariant sequences of acts and utterances that the participants themselves do not invent but to which they must conform. Participants must actually perform these sequences rather than simply invoke or acknowledge them. In this way, mutually enacted invariance can become iconic representations of interindividual reliability, certainty and perhaps even truth. Ritual in the very structure of which authority and acquiescence are implicit, was the primordial means by which men, divested of genetically determined order, established the conventions by which they order themselves.

Rappaport argues that while ritual performance often excites great emotion, if the ritual form is followed correctly, the feeling evinced by participants can deny neither the formal order that is brought into being by ritual nor the fact of participants'

conformity to that order, by virtue of their bringing it into being through their own actions.

Index according to Rappaport is a sign which is identical with that which it signifies. He explains how in all religious rituals there is transmitted an indexical message that cannot be transmitted in any other way and it is one without which the invariant canonical message is without force. Ritual is a complex form in which these two types of messages are dependent on each other, 'whereas the indexical is concerned with the immediate the canonical is concerned with the enduring' (p.179).

In a lengthy middle section of the book dedicated to the temporality of ritual, Rappaport distinguishes between time-dependent ritual regulation and variable-dependent regulation. He argues that variable-dependent regulation is likely to be found in societies in which a few key variables, whose values may fluctuate more or less unpredictably, are the foci of regulation. Time-dependent regulation is more likely to occur in simple societies in which fluctuations of regulated variables are predictable and where seasonality is clearly marked. In societies with complex divisions of labour, he argues, regular periodicity may well be distinguished by ritual but the rituals themselves may not be regulatory. They merely mark periodicities in accordance with which non-ritual agencies may conduct and regulate a range of activities within a common temporal regime. When a temporal regime is contingent upon variable-dependent regulation there is no clear distinction between time and processes occurring in time. With time-dependent regulation the distinction is clear.

In the holy – the union of the sacred and the numinous – the most abstract of conceptions are bound to the most immediate and substantial of experiences. Rappaport summarizes his argument in this remarkable formula:

The unfalsifiable supported by the undeniable yields the unquestionable, which transforms the dubious, the arbitrary, and the conventional into the correct, the necessary and the natural (p.405).

Rappaport pursues difficult and speculative questions concerning his insights into ritual's form and performance and how sanctity arises from these. He devises his own term *cybernetics of the holy* to explain that there are expressions called "ultimate sacred postulates" – like the Muslim Kalima shahadah – that are themselves low in specificity although generally taken to be eternal. They don't tell us how to run society but they sanctify other sentences. These sentences constitute a regulatory hierarchy. The operation of which cannot help but affect material and social conditions which in turn affects the willingness of the members of the community to participate in the rituals that establish or accept the ultimate sacred postulates. That which disrupts cybernetics of the holy is power. Here by power he means physical power.

Rappaport understands the emergence of humanity to be synonymous with the discovery of language and as an inevitable corollary, of religion. Words enable the vast range of human cultures to evolve, but at the cost of introducing deception

and uncertainty. Religion is designed to cope with these two threats to orderly co-existence, and ritual is its means. In our times, religion has been driven from its previous commanding position in commanding societies. It has been replaced by a science that opens up possible knowledge of natural law, but leaves us without any reliable means of generating social order. The task is to reinvent religion in forms that are consistent with our best knowledge of natural law, with a post modern science founded in ecology rather than cosmology, inside rather than outside life. Rappaport's book is thus religious as well as being about religion. It lays out an extraordinary analysis that could be read as a handbook on the practical theory of making religion through ritual.

Rappaport believed that it was human responsibility not merely to think of the world but also to think on behalf of the world. His use of the term "logos" is instructive here. Logos, as word and as underlying order, proposes that it is partially constructed and that it can be violated or challenged. The orders represented in liturgy are conventionally constructed and established performatively in society.

Humanity's task today is to assume responsibility for life as a whole on this planet and religion, the synthesis of objective law and subjective meaning, is indispensable to that end. He intends his book to be a sort of manual for those who would collaborate in the task of remaking religious life along lines compatible with the enhancement of life on this planet. He proposes working towards a new, planet-embracing moral and liturgical order by progressively sanctifying popular resistance to the idolatrous globalization onslaught.

Rappaport offers us religion as a solution to the problem of monetization of everything in late modern societies. This is necessary if to enable the survival of life on our planet is to be insured beyond the short-term future since the current mode of living of humanity is destined to lead us all toward mutual annihilation.

Reviewed by Adeel Khan



Abstracts of Arabic Articles

Samir Khalil Samir, "The Language of Prayer"

The author raises questions about the nature and function of language in the various religious traditions. What was the language of Paradise? What about the language of Adam? And the language of hell? Are there sacred languages? Jews answer Hebrew and Muslims Arabic. Christians, however, recognize no sacred language, and this allows for greater cultural freedom in prayer.

In terms of prayer, the three religions agree to affirm its importance in daily life. It is more repetitive, more structured and formal in Islam, more personal and freer in Christianity. Liturgical prayer takes place usually in churches and mosques, with specific rites. Personal prayer is more common in Christianity and accords with all human situations. Music is an essential element in Christianity, but it is also attested in other traditions.

Finally, the role of language is important in all three religious traditions. The author provides a number of examples in the three traditions to show how literary beauty can positively affect prayer.

Patrick Laude, "Standing, Sitting and Reclining...."

As a meditation on the Quranic verse « Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting, and reclining, and consider the creation of the heavens and the earth, (and say): Our Lord! Thou createdst not this in vain» (Quran 3 :191), this article stresses the importance of "ceaseless prayer" in world religions. It develops the implications of Simone Weil's insight that "every religious practice, every rite, all liturgy is a form of the recitation of the name of the Lord." The author comments upon the major dimensions of « jaculatory prayer », such as its synthetic power, its centrality, its essentiality, its traditional foundations and its contemporary relevance. He also responds to a series of objections raised against it in some religious quarters by referring to scriptural and traditional teachings. Moreover, against modern temptations of spiritual individualism, the author cautions that "the methodical practice of the invocation normally requires an authorization in the form of an induction or initiation into a spiritual rule or contemplative order under the guidance of a spiritual instructor." Laude's final conclusion is that ceaseless prayer or remembrance of the Lord's Name "tends to be understood, at its summit, as the very end and essence of the spiritual path, all other practices converging into its synthetic, unifying, and interiorizing power."

Augustin Okumura, "What Is Prayer?"

In this article the Japanese Catholic theologian Augustin Ichiro Okumura describes prayer as culminating in the innermost concentration of the heart and the involvement of the entire person, body, soul and spirit. The inner and instinctive rhythms of the body, such as heart beating and breathing, are ways of access to spiritual

inwardness, while bodily gestures, such as kneeling and prostrating, express the totality of man's sincerity in prayer.

Mustafa Abu Sway, "Worship in Islam"

This paper addresses the organic relationship between Islamic faith and worship. The Islamic worldview holds the belief that all prophets and messengers, beginning with Adam and ending with the Prophet Muhammad, advocated belief in the oneness of God along with an invitation to worship Him, for He is the only one who deserves to be worshipped.

The theological commonalities and differences between Islam and previous revelations are also considered. According to the Qur'an, previous revelations had the same concept of monotheism, yet they allowed room for some legal differences. This is why, for example, the Qur'an acknowledges the fact that preserving the Sabbath was required of the Children of Israel as a form of worship. The closest equivalent for Muslims is the time for Friday prayer when business transactions come to a pause.

Places of worship, including synagogues, churches, monasteries and mosques, enjoy sanctity including during times of conflict.

The concept of worship in Islam is not restricted to rituals such as the pillars of Islam including the declaration of faith, the five daily prayers, fasting the month of Ramadan, almsgiving and pilgrimage to Mecca. Worship in Islam includes every act performed in accordance with the Islamic worldview as long as it is sincere and performed for the sake of God.

Some examples of non-ritual acts of worship are protecting and sustaining the environment, fighting poverty, disease and illiteracy, facing injustice on a local or global level, protecting Muslims and non-Muslims alike, improving political representation, defending one's land, not attacking another country and respecting international treaties, as long as they do not involve injustice, and are at the service of people, are all acts of worship as long as there is a sincere intention.

To be a "worshipper" (Arabic, *`Abd*) entails servitude to God. It is considered an honor to be included in such a category that reflects submission to the will of God.

Ritual worshipping in Islam should be performed in moderation according to the way of the Prophet, the Sunna. No extremes are allowed. A Muslim should not continuously fast during the year, nor pray throughout the night, every night, and should not pledge celibacy. The Muslim community is described as a community of a middle-path (*wasat*). Following the Prophetic model ensures that the Muslim's worship remains within the parameters of the Shari'ah.

Moderation, however, does not preclude a degree of perfection (*Ihsan*). This state of spirituality is explained in a famous tradition by the Prophet as "worshipping God as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He sees you." This is an invitation to be God-conscious while praying or performing other rituals.

One of the most important forms of worship is the recollection of the name of God (*dhikr*). The most important aspect of this sublime form is to restrict practicing it to the Prophetic model. Innovation in this field is problematic.

The paper concludes with the Qur'anic invitation to the "People of the Book" to a "Common Word" to only worship God, which is to confirm the original monotheistic message that was revealed throughout the ages.

Ali ben Mbarek, "Prayer as the language of scholars (Al Fuqaha) and Sufis: Dangerous deviations"

Prayer raises, as far as its religious and ritual aspect are concerned, several problems, the most serious of which being connected to its relationship to language. Prayer was associated, since its inception, to language in terms of significance, function and interest. And we can not touch upon it without an in-depth study of the relationship between religion and language, which reveals, in its turn, a complex mix of cultural, political and religious aspects.

Language is tied to religion in the form of teachings, hymns, songs, joys and sorrows. Religious thought was able to shape a language based on religion. It is not an exaggeration to say that language is the essential ingredient of cultures and civilizations. Thus we see that so many nations adopted new religions while they never changed their language. This means that language is the most important form of cultural communication. In Islam, prayer is adopted, as is the case with other religions, as a way to perform rituals and communicate with Allah. Prayer is the religious language par excellence: praying is a free spiritual discourse between the creature and his Creator.

While prayer is a spiritually open activity, scholars in various Abrahamic traditions attempted to regulate the forms and conditions of worship in view of determining their validity or invalidity, and the way to correct errors. Thus, the language of prayer becomes, with scholars, a complex language that is difficult to access. It is turned into the language of a religious elite that can be only understood by those who studied jurisprudence. But praying, in essence, is a matter of simple language that does not recognize borders, barriers and laws and rejects all mediation or complexity. The mercy of Allah is bestowed on all mankind and there are many roads leading to it. Consequently, Sufis criticized the scholars' definition of the relationship between language and prayer by suggesting that the latter do not reach the main core of the subject. Thus they do not understand the secrets and the mysteries of prayer and its meaning.

The debate between Sufis and scholars about the relationship between language and prayer is not only limited to Islamic culture but it is also to be found, *mutatis mutandis*, in Judaism, Christianity and other religions as well.

Muhammad Khalifah Hassan, "The unity of the language of prayer in world religions"

It has been noticed in the history of world religions that despite the apparent differences between world religions in their understanding of God, man and the world, they tend to use almost the same language in prayer and in expressing the relation between man and God. In this paper we try to analyze and explain this phenomenon and to establish the main foundations for this unity in the language of prayer. This unity is actually based on the unity of human nature, and the unity of religious experience and religious expression. Based on a comparative approach an attempt is made to understand the language of prayer in the monotheistic traditions which share quasi-similar religious concepts and terminology in expressing the relation between man and God. They share the same religious essence and structure as well, since they conceive God and the relation with Him in personal terms. Hence the use of a quasi-similar language in prayer. Based on this personal relation between man and God prayer is envisaged as a dialogical discourse between man and the Divine that opens the way to a dialogue between man and the universe. In this dialogue love of God is reflected in the relationship between man and the world. Prayer is therefore the means of communication of the mutual love between man and the Divine.

Leila Khaleefah, "Ibn 'Arabi on God's prayer, the universe's prayer, and man's prayer: A higher wisdom manifested in a worldly practice."

In all faiths and religions, prayer (*Salat*) is the link between the human being and the Creator, or the human and the essence of his/her creation and existence. In Islam, the five daily prayers – involving movements and utterances of chapters from Qura'n that span the day and the night – evoke for Muhiyuddin Ibn 'Arabi (died 638 AH; 1240 CE) the creation of man. Prayer, thus, presents a particular closeness and connection between God and man, as it draws on multiple dimensions of human faculties and experience: movements and utterances; meanings and evocations; the discernible and the perceptible.

Furthermore, Ibn 'Arabi reckoned prayer to reflect, in origin, the creation of man and the universe. The thirteenth-century philosopher and mystic argued that the creation of man drew on, and in turn reflected, all the other creations in the universe – including plants, animals, as well as celestial bodies. In man's composition, Ibn 'Arabi contended, are found all the elements and phases of all creation, and prayers echo this diversity of elements and phases.

For instance, the five prayers correspond to the five faculties of sense that man has control over. The number of prayers also conforms to the (five) phases of the sun during the course of a day, and in the meantime matches the number of classical elements in man's constitution: light, fire, earth, air, and water. In the course of praying, man travels through the different phases, both the discernible and the ac-

tual, and distinguishes the part from the whole, for it is only for this knowledge that man descended from Heaven to earth, in what Ibn 'Arabi calls "dignifying descent"

The movements in prayers, including kneeling and prostration, reflect the various standings of human existence – the zenith of which is the "prostration of the heart," whereby alignment is achieved between the forehead and feet; the mouth and the heart; earth and Heaven. It is the highest dignity a worshipper can attain because it is then that man can witness the divine and enjoy its full enlightenment. And it is only then that man becomes a complete human. Once there, Ibn 'Arabi went on to say, man breaks wholly free from any and all the temptations of the devil, for by now man is entirely within God's compassion. To fall for the devil's temptations, after all, Ibn 'Arabi believed, was not to turn away from God, but to fall out of His compassion. But then God's compassion is the essence of His creating man. It was compassion that led to creation, and it is that creation that is God's prayer.

In other words, the will to create man and the universe is God's prayer that preceded and forever accompanies the creation: "He it is who sends His blessings (*Salat*) on you" (33:43). That is, God has shown His compassion by bringing man to existence out of non-existence, as Ibn 'Arabi put it. And since God urges man to mimic His attributes, He urges man to pray in order to attain the compassion attending to the creation that prayer evokes. In doing so, man receives, in turn, God's compassion, which brings him closer to the Creator.

Dheen Mohammad, "Prayer and religious experience in Islam"

This article is an exploration of the relationship between prayer and worship at large. The author argues for the efficacy of prayer in complete surrender to God. This argument is founded on Quranic and Prophetic sources describing different kinds of worships and their respective rewards. The author delves into the mystical dimension of prayer as conceived by practitioners of Sufism. He explains that their mode of prayer is the most direct means of reaching proximity to God. The article concludes with an examination of the social dimensions of prayer.



Biographies

Philip Zaleski is a Research Associate in the Department of Religion at Smith College. His many books include *The Recollected Heart*, *The Benedictines of Petersham*, *Gifts of the Spirit*, and, with his wife Carol Zaleski, *Prayer: A History* and *The Book of Heaven*. He is also the editor of the *Best Spiritual Writing* series, an annual collection of the year's best religious prose and poetry, now in its fourteenth year of publication, and an editor of *Second Spring: A Journal of Faith & Culture*.

Akintunde E. Akinade is visiting Professor of Theology at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar. He co-edited *The Agitated Mind of God: The Theology of Kosuke Koyama* with Dale T. Irvin and *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity* with David Ogungbile. He is the editor of *A New Day: Essays on World Christianity in Honor of Lamin Sanneh*. He is presently working on *West African Religious History* for NYU Press and *Abiding Faith: Christian Responses to Islam in Nigeria* for Palgrave/Macmillan Press. He serves on the Editorial Board of *The Muslim World*, *Religions*, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, *The Trinity Journal of Theology*, and *The Living Pulpit*. He is also the book review editor for *The Journal of World Christianity*. Within the American Academy of Religion, he serves on the Committee on The Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession.

James S. Cutsinger (Ph.D., Harvard) is Professor of Theology and Religious Thought at the University of South Carolina. A widely recognized writer on the *sophia perennis* and the perennialist school of comparative religious thought, Professor Cutsinger is also an authority on the theology and spirituality of the Christian East. His publications include *The Form of Transformed Vision: Coleridge and the Knowledge of God*, *Advice to the Serious Seeker: Meditations on the Teaching of Frithjof Schuon*, *Not of This World: A Treasury of Christian Mysticism*, and *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*. Cutsinger has been honored with several teaching awards, including most recently the Michael J. Mungo Distinguished Professor of the Year for 2011, his university's most prestigious faculty award.

John Herlihy was born in Boston, Massachusetts of Irish American origin. He has worked for over 45 years as a professor of academic writing and as a Director in educational management. He has written a number of books on travel and spirituality, with special emphasis on the integration of the traditional world within the modern world. His recent books include *Borderlands of the Spirit* and *Wisdom's Journey*. He now resides in Sharjah, the United Arab Emirates, and works as the Director of the English Language Center at the University of Sharjah.

Samuel Zinner, historian, linguist and religious scholar, specializes in ancient esoteric, theological and philosophical traditions. He received his PhD in America from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he concentrated on philology, literature,

history and religion. He is the author of several works, including *Christianity and Islam: Essays in Ontology and Archetype* (London: Matheson Trust, 2011), and the forthcoming works *The Abrahamic Archetype: Essays on the Transcendent and Formal Relationships between Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Cambridge, UK: Archetype) and *The Gospel of Thomas in the Light of Ancient Jewish, Christian and Islamic Esoteric Trajectories* (London: Matheson Trust). His current projects include an Aramaic analysis of the *Gospel of Thomas* and a translation of the Qur'an with an exegetical and comparative philological apparatus. Dr. Zinner divides his time between Europe and Morocco.

Vincent Rossi is an Eastern Orthodox theologian, teacher and writer whose primary focus is Eastern Christian monasticism, hesychast spirituality and the *Philokalia*. Founder of the well-known theological Journal, *Epiphany*, he served as its editor for 12 years and has published numerous articles on theological, mystical, ascetical and ecological themes.

Jane Dammen McAuliffe is President of Bryn Mawr College and Professor of Islamic Studies. Formerly, she was Dean of Arts and Sciences at Georgetown University. Her research has focused on the Qur'an, early Islamic history and the interactions of Islam and Christianity. She recently published the six-volume *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (2001-2006) and the *Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an* (2006).

Ori Z. Soltes teaches theology and art history at Georgetown University. He is the author of over 200 books, catalogues, articles and essays across various disciplines. His latest book is *Untangling the Web: A Thinking Person's Guide to Why the Middle East is a Mess and Always Was*.

Peter Ochs (Ph.D. Yale; MA Jewish Theological Seminary) is Edgar Bronfman Professor of Modern Judaic Studies at the University of Virginia, where he also directs Religious Studies graduate programs in "Scripture, Interpretation, and Practice" – an interdisciplinary approach to the Abrahamic traditions and more. He is co-founder of the (Abrahamic) Society for Scriptural Reasoning and the (Jewish) Society for Textual Reasoning. His many publications include *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews; The Free Church and Israel's Covenant; Crisis, Call and Leadership in the Abrahamic Traditions* (ed.); *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (ed.); *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture; Reviewing The Covenant: Eugene Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewal of Theology; Christianity in Jewish Terms* (ed.); *Reasoning after Revelation: Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy; The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity* (ed.); *Understanding the Rabbinical Mind* (ed.). He is co-author of *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*. With Stanley Hauerwas and Ebrahim Moosa, he co-edits the book series *Encountering Traditions* (Stanford U Press). Professor Ochs serves on the editorial boards of *Modern Theology*, *Theology Today*, and *Crosscurrents*.