

Lewis on Prayer

On Distraction in Prayer

Lewis in *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* ch. 4 para. 18, p.23

If we lay all the cards on the table, God will help us to moderate the excesses. But the pressure of things we are trying to keep out of our mind is a hopeless distraction. As someone said, "No noise is so emphatic as one you are trying not to listen to."

On the Real I and the Real God in Prayer

Lewis in *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* ch. 15, para. 15-17, pp.81-82

"The dramatic person could not tread the stage unless he concealed a real person; unless the real and unknown I existed, I would not even make mistakes about the imagined me. And in prayer this real I struggles to speak, for once, from his real being, and to address, for once, not the other actors, but - what shall I call Him? The Author, for He invented us all? The Producer, for He controls all? Or the Audience, for He watches, and will judge, the performance?"

The attempt is not to escape from space and time and from my creaturely situation as a subject facing objects. It is more modest: to re-awake the awareness of that situation. If that can be done, there is no need to go anywhere else. This situation itself is, at every moment, a possible theophany. Here is the holy ground: the Bush is burning now.

... The Prayer preceding all prayers is "May it be the real I who speaks. May it be the real Thou that I speak to." Infinitely various are the levels from which we pray. Emotional intensity is in itself no proof of spiritual depth. If we pray in terror we shall pray earnestly; it only proves that terror is an earnest emotion. Only God Himself can let the bucket down to the depths in us. And, on the other side, He must constantly work as the iconoclast. Every idea of Him we form, He must in mercy shatter. The most blessed result of prayer would be to rise thinking "But I never knew before, I never dreamed..." I suppose it was at such a moment that Thomas Aquinas said of all his own theology, "It reminds me of straw."

On Prayer as Duty & Delight

Lewis in *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* ch.21, para. 11-15 pp. 114-116.

If we were perfected, prayer would not be a duty, it would be a delight. Some day, please God, it will be. The same is true of many other behaviors which now appear as duties. If I loved my neighbor as myself, most of the actions which are now my moral duty would flow out of me as spontaneously as song from a lark or fragrance from a flower. Why is this not so yet? Well, we know, don't we? Aristotle has taught us that delight is the "bloom" on an unimpeded activity. But the very activities for which we were created are, while we live on earth, variously impeded: by evil in ourselves or in others. Not to practice them is to abandon our humanity. To practice them spontaneously and delightfully is not yet possible. This situation creates the category of duty, the whole specifically moral realm.

It exists to be transcended. Here is the paradox of Christianity. As practical imperatives for here and now the two great commandments have to be translated "Behave *as if* you loved God and man." For no man can love because he is told to. Yet obedience on this practical level is not really obedience at all. And if a man really loved God and man, once again this would hardly be obedience; for if he did, he would be unable to help it. Thus the command really says to us, "Ye must be born again." Till then, we have duty, morality, the Law. A schoolmaster, as St. Paul says, to bring us to Christ. We must expect no more of it than of a schoolmaster; we must allow it no less... But the school-days, please God, are numbered. There is no morality in Heaven. The angels never knew (from within) the meaning of the word *ought*, and the blessed dead have long since gladly forgotten it. This is why Dante's Heaven is so right, and Milton's, with its military discipline so silly.

... In the perfect and eternal world the Law will vanish. But the results of having lived faithfully under it will not. I am therefore not really deeply worried by the fact prayer is at present a duty, and even an irksome one.