



## PRAYER

Any man in our time knows, is aware of, and operates out of the consciousness that anything important relative to being human, to describing humanness, is something that I and my fathers are now and have always been totally immersed in, that is, standing in up to our armpits. I suppose this understanding is the most valuable of all the intellectual tools that I have in my possession, the last thing I would want to give up. And my fathers have always had this understanding. Therefore, when I talk about prayer, when I talk about contemplation, or when I talk about meditation, I'm not going to look somewhere else for it; I'm not going to try and reach some other region for it; I'm not going to try to superimpose that on life. The whole subject of my exercise is to discover how that is mine already.

People have been concerned here recently with cleaning their dormitory suites. If anybody thinks, for instance, that cleaning his room is one problem and then another problem is the fact that, by the accident of history, the other people in those other beds are some libertines and some pharisees, then he doesn't understand the problem of cleaning a room at all. The problem of keeping your room clean is always, inextricably, tied with the fact that the people you're going to have to enlist in that job are some libertines and some pharisees. If you don't see that that is where you start, you've missed the whole problem.

I wonder if when you and I think about Vietnam, we grasp at all the problem there, or the kind of advice we're going to give to President Thieu, or General Abrams, or Ho Chi Minh's successors. That is, the problem there has to be addressed by the kind of style with which we're going to relate to that situation. And unless you and I understand that, we don't understand the problem at all.

What I'm trying to say is that in Vietnam and in your bedroom there is a relationship between whatever new social vehicle you would invent, and the new religious mode. That just sounds so practical you can't imagine us spending any time on it. But some of the people in your bedroom are going to be so unconcerned about keeping it clean while some of the others are going to think that energy spent there has one of the highest priorities-cleanliness is after all. . .well, you know where it ranks. And you add to this that you enter the scene, and your analysis of that situation and your division of the libertine group and the pharisee group are going to be greatly affected by which camp you are in.

Now how is it possible to talk about the struggle to be human in our times, unless we see that there is not going to be anything done in Vietnam, there is not going to be anything done in that bedroom of yours, unless there is a style which is adequate to deal with the real dynamics of the situation. You and I are kidding ourselves unless we see that.

There is a lot of cheap talk, you know, about everybody participating. "Everybody needs to participate." Then you run into a real problem: a broom and a room. And you say, "Forget it! I'm surrounded by the dirtiest bunch of irresponsible so and so's." Or, "I wouldn't touch a broom even if it had a golden handle, and please those obnoxious ones who think that's the most important thing we have to do here this summer."

What would you suggest about polity in Vietnam, when you and I know that democracy is no answer? Have a vote? Why, I don't know how the Vietnamese people would even dare to gather together in that large a group, for fear that they're presenting a target for somebody. How can you have a vote in that kind of situation? And is the answer from Hanoi adequate? I would suggest to you it is not.

That kind of bankruptcy is very serious. I don't know about you, but I regard the social fabric as very, very fragile. And its fragility is symbolized far, far too often for me. No social fabric can exist, no social fabric can be invented, unless there is a new religious mode. And forget those three words!

No social vehicle can be created unless there is glue to make that vehicle operate, to enable that vehicle to operate, to give people the courage to try again, not only this afternoon, but to try again tomorrow morning when it fails this afternoon. Anybody will try something, oh, three times. But there's not one single social problem I know of that's going to give way under just three good tries. So the question is, how do people get the . . . And you almost have to leave that blank because otherwise you wouldn't need to ask the question. But how do they get the X in order to build, in order to invent, in order to go on inventing, to go on building, to go on rebuilding?

We want to talk about this kind of thing in these discourses and want to begin talking about something that we call the solitaries. That's a name for three dimensions that we call meditation, contemplation, and prayer. Now, those are just a lot of words. You know, our fathers gave us that baggage. The question is whether they mean anything, whether they can mean anything, whether those three categories under the solitaries point to anything important that we are standing in up to our armpits and have to know about.

First of all, these three categories are talking about something that's one cloth. You can't meditate and not be contemplating. You can't pray and not be contemplating. You can't pray and not be meditating. You can't contemplate and not be meditating. All of these go on at the same time.

I was most educated in terms of these three categories by a very small seminar I ran one time. I have a friend in Washington who is a stock broker, and we needed to have a push for funds recently. He arranged for me to go out with his boss, the president of the brokerage firm. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, so we went to this nice sort of plush, dark place. And we started talking about money. I was trying to tell him what we were all about. So I said that we were not going to be anything less than inclusive, we were not going to do anything less than the necessary, we were not going to be other than serious. My friend the stock broker is a Methodist and his boss is a Roman Catholic. And his boss has tried to be a serious churchman, as others of us have also. So he finally said to me, "You say that this is something that you're interested in in terms of every man, that this is not some private club? OK, let's say you win. What do you expect to happen to the people in this place?" I looked around the room-everybody was lifting various delights-and I was fascinated by that question. And as I reflected on the fascination, I had another set of gears back there trying to work really fast. This man had taken me seriously. "OK, so what's going to happen to humanness, what's going to happen to civilization?" He asked the question very practically.

Well, I would suggest to you that what we are pointing to is that every man be the sociality that he is; that every man be in touch with all that it means to be of a society, all that it means to be human in terms of the social-that means in terms of all of our past as well as all of our future. It means that a man be able to talk with, to have conversations with all of those people that enable him to be human, that enable him to be social.

This means that every man in the room has the possibility of being present to the mystery in his life. Every man has mystery in his life, but what does it mean to decide to relate to that mystery? What does it mean to know that it's possible to call that mystery by name? Not to rush in with the name immediately, but to understand that the religious exercise in history-in the twentieth century you almost have to say the secular religious activity in history-has been to name that mystery.

And this means that finally every man in the room would be a free man; that every man in the room be his freedom.

This man understood. I mean, he didn't understand-these categories were all strange to him, and he kept raising his eyebrows-but he was interested. He knew that this was-how might I put it-the name on a gate, or something. And I think I learned more about what we are trying to say here with that man running that seminar that day (because I figured he asked the best questions) than any time in my life. This is what we want to talk about.

We are also going to talk about the journeys and about the corporates. What we mean by the journeys is knowing and being and doing. What we mean by the corporates is poverty, chastity, and obedience. Again, we have to be able to talk about what we mean when we are relating these categories this way. When you are talking about prayer as freedom, you have to be clear that you are talking about that thrust that you mean by obedience. There is no prayer outside obedience. You don't pray for the local congregation unless you are obedient to it. There is no way to talk about the relationship to being that you and I choose to take in prayer outside of obedience. There is no freedom outside of obedience.

Only three or four days ago did I discover that I have known all my life that I wanted to deliver this lecture. I discovered that all my life I wanted to deliver exactly this lecture. That is really the wrong place to start because, I tell you, I wouldn't trust anybody who said he was eager to talk about prayer! That would be the last person I'd ever listen to.

I remember a dear woman in that RSI course in Broken Hill, Australia. She said she wanted to talk about hospital visiting during one part of the course. I was frightened to death until she said, "I hate hospital visiting." Then my interest really picked up. If she wanted to talk about it with that kind of introduction . . . well, OK. So I know that I have to tell you that I consider myself the last man in the whole world to talk about prayer, because I figure nobody would dare trust anybody that was eager to move into this area.

It is something like this. How does a man who has always, always imagined-and you and I, take it, don't need any short courses on the power of images-that he was very shallow, who always imagined that he came through with the first answer, who imagined that his picture and participation of life was that of being very, very superficial-how does such a one talk about discovering the category of prayer? How do you talk about discovering the category of prayer in such a way that life seems to be saying to you that you don't have to be a wallflower any more? That you can join in the dance, that you can be a full human being. That never again do you need to say to yourself that this dimension of life is one that you don't participate in. This kind of reflection, when you say it out loud, seems so facile and so brittle and so automatic. But I mean to point to a matter of life and death-the sort of secret suspicion some of us have that there are some people who are really participating in life, that there are some people who feel deeply, who laugh deeply and who hurt deeply, who know and who do and who be, deeply; and the rest of us can have the crumbs from that table.

I would suggest that if we imagine that it's possible to do praying or not to do praying, and that that's one of the options in life-that you can either pray or not pray and still be human-well then, we all ought to go home. Either we are talking about that which is utterly required, that which is utterly human, or what we are talking about is not what prayer is, or what we know prayer to be. Let's just get out of this outfit entirely, if prayer is not that without which one cannot be human.

I want to say, first of all, that prayer is sheer action, that prayer is the action underneath action. Prayer is that action which makes action. Or, prayer is that which makes action into a deed. It is a happening; it is sheer happening. That's what prayer is.

And prayer is freedom. Now, I know that everybody goes around saying they want to be free. No doubt you've heard people suggest that they want to express themselves. Well, you've got to be some kind of a naive romantic or the shrewdest demon available to get that kind of nonsense out. Nobody wants to be free. Maybe there are people who want to express themselves. I get a picture of what it means to want to express yourself. That's like running up and throwing a blob of something and running back. That is sort of an abstract picture of action, but that's not action. Nobody wants to be free. Nobody wants to participate in life in those irreversible processes.

Oh my, we humans have always known life was irreversible. Why, we have such fantastic myths about making deals with the devil: I'll give you this and you give me that. That's a fabulous part of our common history. And the fact always comes out that if you make a deal with the devil you don't win. Well, you have to be a naive romantic to imagine that people want to be free. Or you have to be going around saying, "We want to express ourselves," as a kind of lucid demon who knows that that will get everybody all upset. That's a great monkey wrench to throw into things.

I remember how my political education in Texas began with the tidelands issue. A politician there had said, "The Texas tidelands should belong to the school children." What he meant was, "The oil companies that I represent figure that they can get more of that oil and pay less for it if they are dealing with the school children rather than with the federal government." If you think that people want to be free, you belong on either of those poles-the naive romantic or the demon.

This means that being confronted with our freedom is just nausea. I mean, once you grasp that you are about to put all of this hard-to-replace protoplasm out in such a way that you can't really take it back, you experience nausea. Oh, it's possible to walk backwards, but that's walking backwards. That's not taking back the steps you took forward, at all. Prayer is literally creating something out of nothing. What you are doing in bringing into being a happening that otherwise would not be there, that history is otherwise without.

The Church is great on this. My favorite example for that is the wedding service. The Church makes it clear in about nine thousand ways that something is happening there. My favorite one is having that poor, innocent, naive, green, young female come down the aisle. You know, like one foot after another she has to move from one end of the church to the other. And so afterwards, when they say that something has happened here (the translation of which is, "I pronounce you man and wife"), she is aware that she has moved, that she

has pushed into that situation. That's what prayer is. It is always a happening. What has happened in that situation, which otherwise would be walking from the back pew to the front pew, is that some entirely new thing has happened in history. Irreversible! Whatever happens to that family, some new thing has happened. Bringing to be what never was before is prayer.

Secondly, prayer is deep resolve. It is confronting, it is being present to, it is choosing to remain present to that mystery which always reveals itself as unrevealedness. Resolve. Deep resolve. The League is manifest only in prayer. The only time you ever see the League is when it is marching. The only time that the League is manifest is when there is a happening. And that kind of happening, the choosing that there be a happening, is prayer. You and I don't have the guts to create anything except on the shoulders of the League, so that any man who sees himself as the League sees himself as carrying on the work of building on that which has been

Prayer is radical tactic, and that means that there is a chart on the wall of what you plan to do. That is what prayer is, a chart on the wall. You put a chart on the wall, and something starts happening. People begin to start thinking that that's really the way it is.

Sometimes in the Daily Office we get lots of prayers like, "Oh, gee whiz, isn't that bad for those people over in Africa. I'll pray for all the Africans who are hungry this morning." Well, unless you have a tactic to go with that, it's nothing. I just think the kind of suspicion that we have relative to each other in the area of prayer is very, very salubrious to the whole exercise. So I want to see what kind of plans you have relative to all those poor starving Africans.

What does it mean when you and I go around with some kind of failure mentality? It seems a little unfair to talk about recruitment any more than is necessary, but you know how it is possible to talk there. You say, "Well, we had twenty percent fewer courses fail this quarter than last", and that compares with eighteen percent that we didn't hold the quarter before last"-all that kind of stuff. Well, the man of prayer wins. There is no adequate substitute for winning.

St. Thomas Aquinas said that the Church had to have a way to give permission to some revolutions against some governments. Then, of course, Aquinas was systematic. He had a set of criteria of how the Church might go about giving permission for some revolutions. One of those criteria was that the revolution was going to succeed.

You and I know what it is like sitting around beating ourselves over the head, talking about how we've been trying. How in the world did that phrase get to be so powerful in our vocabulary and in the kind of myths we tell ourselves? "You don't have to succeed, do you? All you have to do is try." Well, not for the man of prayer. The man of prayer understands that what he prays for is answered. I think that trial by fire comes out of this great deep human understanding about reality. If your prayer life is adequate, you can walk across those coals. Get started!

Could it be that the measure of your prayer life is whether you are winning, and therefore, whether you have decided to win? Ah, yes, that's the issue-whether you've decided to stay up all night putting flesh and blood on your decision to win.

I remember something I said cynically once about Robert Kennedy. (You know how cynicism sometimes does illuminate areas. The first time I said this I was cynical. I have not said this cynically one time since.) Before Robert Kennedy was sort of canonized, back in the days when he was still sort of a nasty guy, you know, the guy who really wanted to be in charge of the F.B.I., that "otherguy'syounger-brother" period, I remember saying one time, cynically, "Well, in the past we have been able to say, 'What would Jesus do?'" But I find it more helpful to say, "What would Robert Kennedy do?" I said it and then I was never able to say that cynically again. The minute that got out of my mouth it came back and fell all over me. Do you understand? That man does not say, "Well, we have four bus loads and there are only three buses. Send the other twentyfive percent home." That man does not say, "You can't get there from here in that length of time." That man does not say, "All the old men are on the other side in this situation." Do you have any question that Robert Kennedy would just not go to bed until the problem was solved? I'm sorry I was ever cynical. I've never gotten over that. I take it that that is what you mean by prayer as radical tactic. You build a model that shows you what the timely act is.

Finally, prayer is mortal combat. By mortal combat I mean that with prayer you decide to tackle Being. You decide over against all reasons for being hesitant, over against all the safety that is possible, all the possibilities of what you're up against. Well, you know how it is, how you talk to yourself about your academic life in college, about how really bright you are, but you just didn't quite get started. Well, you can go on doing that for the rest of your life. "I just never did get started. I didn't have the right methods." I would suggest that prayer is mortal combat in the sense that it is the decision to radically tackle Being. You cannot be a patriarch in the Old Testament unless you've fought with God. It's simply a requirement. If you haven't fought with God, you are not a patriarch. It's as simple as that. You remember Jacob? It was dark, and he was all alone. That's what it means to tackle Being. Not even to know where the enemy is all the time, to fight him in the dark, and alone. Alone. Alone, alone.

Relative to your marriage, you don't even know what the issues are. Relative to your marriage, you don't know whether a particular problem is a hill you have to take because the rest of the battle depends on it, or whether it is not even concerned with the main issue. But deciding to tackle your marriage is a part of what it means to wrestle with Being. And any man or woman who chooses to avoid that battle has chosen to remain in Hell. Wrestling with God is serious. My own translation of the Jacob battle is that it ended when God

kicked him in the groin. I've always understood that story since I've decided that. That is to say, it is a real battle. And it's for the whole show-for everything.

One of the difficulties of deciding to wrestle with God, one of the strange dimensions of that dynamic, is that God always wins. God has never lost one time. Not even once. There are rows upon rows of all the soldiers who fought with God, and they're all lying rotting in their graves. And He put them there. God always wins.

God wins every time. Yet the man of prayer knows that what it means to be human is to decide to wrestle with Being. And the fantastic thing is that sometimes it appears that you've won-that is, when God has decided to let you win for a little while. And if that isn't unnerving! I mean, if Rommel was on the other side of the hill over there, and you discovered that he just let you win a little battle, wouldn't you be a little worried?

It's like the fundraising drive we had recently. Oh, that was impossible. You just imagine. There were so many of us loyally turning cranks and saying, "This isn't going to work at all," that it was a sin. And the fantastic thing was that God let us win that time. We received over a quarter of a million dollars. I can barely even get all that out. And you see the problem, don't you? That means that we are able to get all our troops out on the plain now. That means we can work for the Local Church. Right? Right.

It's like He permits a "good guy" to marry an "irresistible religious." That's what I call my wife when I think of a nice name for her. Those are just not the kind of pairs that go together, good guys and irresistible religiouses. But, oh, I don't know, I'll whisper it, and let the news be passed along, "We're winning." You don't like to say that out loud. We've been married only eight years, and we had an anniversary last year at a time when we had been separated for four weeks before and were going to be separated for four weeks afterwards. (That was connected with some of my colleagues' plans.) So we were together for about thirty hours on what happened to be our eighth anniversary. And neither one of us pushed the abort button for thirty hours. How to resist pressing that button when you know it's four weeks before and four weeks afterwards that you're separated, and that those thirty hours have to come off!

We are winning, but that means our life is given back to us in terms of the spirit movement and the Local Church again. And so, even when God lets you win, it's awful. Every prayer leaves Being different. The decision to wake up in the morning and make something happen leaves Being different. It's impossible to change Being. Impossible. but it leaves it different

Also in terms of prayer being mortal combat, it is in Jesus' name. Every prayer is in Jesus' name. You and I stand on that strange historical reality. Every prayer that has been offered, every prayer that has ever been uttered, is in Jesus' name-that is, when one was up against all that is, when one was up against Being. That's how you talk about prayer in a foxhole as being authentic, if it is in Jesus' name, if it is in the name of that final reality. And if it is in the name of the final reality-that is, if in that foxhole you are up against all that is-then that is an authentic prayer.

You and I know what an inauthentic prayer is. That is one that's offered in the name of my personal security. You know, "I have to have this because . . ." and then you fill in the blank with whatever particular crisis is going on in your own personal security.

Oh, you must have uttered a lot of those prayers. I remember when I was eight years old and my parents were gone, and a friend of mine and I decided to try out the boxing gloves. We decided that the best ring was in the living room, because there was a nice soft rug in there. And you can't imagine the prayers that were going on in terms of my own personal security relative to having that living room lamp just come back together. But when the man of prayer prays, his prayers are in Jesus' name whether he's heard the name or not.

What does it mean to link concrete, tactical models for the Local Church to spiritual reality? Because if they're not related to spiritual reality-and they tell me that the paper that they are printed on is probably worth less than two cents-they are not even worth that. The tactical models have to be the warp, and the spiritual reality, the woof, or vice versa. Who is to say whether it is the tactics that are the straight lines, and the spirit the woven ones, or whether it is the spirit reality that's the straight lines, and that the tactics are just woven on that reality. Who's to say which is first? I would suggest to you that it's not possible to say which is first, and, if I had to choose, I would suggest that it is the spirit reality.

So what we are about is: how is it that the local congregation may be enabled to be for humanness? How is it possible to answer that man in Washington, D.C., who has been prepared from the beginning of time to be a churchman? He is already waiting, saying, "What is it you want to happen to this room full of people?" And he is a man of prayer because he makes things move. He is a man of responsibility because he knows what it means to assume responsibility for that moving. And he is a man who is suffering because he hurts relative to Washington, D.C. That man is already there. You don't have to go out and invent the Church.

Fred Buss