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“A Life We Never Dared Hope For”

“Prayer is both struggle and surrender”

“Many are the ways of prayer”

More of Brother Roger of Taizé's thought this week, following on from last week's section, which he subtitled, “A Life From Elsewhere.” This segment is entitled, “Another's Looking,” and it's purposely capitalised. He wrote, ^{1 2}

“Another's Looking”

What distinguishes a person who builds her entire life on the challenge of prayer from somebody who is indifferent to it? To the outward eye, there's nothing. The person who prays is the same as everyone else, getting up each morning, walking around, eating... but within, there is all the difference in the world. For that person, the challenge of prayer is a creation more essential than the events of her own history.

If prayer were aimed at some practical goal, what a mockery it would be! Nothing but a projection of ego needs; prayer reduced to a set of transactions, bargaining with God! Whether serene contemplation or inner struggle, prayer is just learning to place everything in other hands, with the simplicity of a child.

Through the steadfastness of prayer, each one finds energy for other struggles – for maintaining her family and friends or for transforming social conditions... far from withdrawing or escaping from events and from people, she now considers them with eyes informed by Another's looking.

When someone is desperately self-seeking, when she cannot tear her eyes away from herself, the pride of life sweeps her along with its inevitable accompaniment of ambition, careerism and the longing to accomplish much and be a success.”

An anomalous aspect of this self-seeking is that the success we crave is often not 'ours' but a success imprinted within us - established and judged by others' eyes, but not by Another's looking. Prayer helps us break the mould into which we were poured by our early

formative experiences; a mould that is designed and works well as a safe cocoon for a pupa, but which later can enchain and kill the adult imago.³

"But if, on the contrary, she lets Another use her eyes, then nothing but the unique reality will count.

Everything depends on how we look at ourselves, at other people, and events. So much so, that almost everything that happens to us arises out of ourselves. Either the pride of life is the driving-force of our existence (and all that counts is domination of people and things, by money but also without money): or, Christ's looking takes the place of our own. Then the way lies open for the gift of our lives.

"The Gateway of Praise"

Someone dear to me gave me an account one day of a whole inner battle:

'I have known what it is to be tempted by self-analysis - all its question marks, its incessant who-are-you's and its endless whys. This sort of questioning can sometimes lead to vanity, but more often than not the result is sadness, shame and self-contempt. So I kept turning over the earth of my being, working at it in an attempt to make it more and more beautiful, until in the end I had made the beauty of my earth a goal in itself, forgetting that the aim is to sow a seed of Gospel in it.

I knew the words in Isaiah, "you shall call your gateways praise". But I called mine introspection anguish and scruple. Who then will open up their gateways of praise?

Shortly before he died in 1943, a political prisoner in southern Spain, Miguel Hernandez, unveiled a certain secret:

'Open, Love, in me the gates
Of the perfect wound;
Open, to release the useless anguish;
Open; see; coming,
the breath of your word.'

The gateways of praise give passage to deathly anguish and to songs unending. God will set his mark on the very wounds themselves, making them no longer torment, but energy for communion.

To want a life with no contradictions, shocks, opposition, with no criticism, is to fall into discarnate dreaming.⁴ Confronted by the shaking of foundations, in ourselves, in the Church, or in human society, we are offered two ways.

Either hurt and anguish pass into bitterness, when, groaning under the crushing load, we become rooted to the spot and all is lost.

Or else pain and sadness find an outlet in the praise of God's love, lifting us out of passivity and enabling us to deal with anything that comes our way."

introspection, anguish and scruple! My doorway carried the script, "I am no more worthy to be called your son". Those are narrow gates, not opening outwards at all, but inwards to the lowest levels of one's egoic being.

From now on I shall call my gateways praise! These gates open outwards, wide and bold towards the outside world, towards Him who is beyond all things and beyond myself.'

When introspection and analysis turns people in on themselves, what destruction that brings!

Love and blessings, David



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¹ Brother Roger (1980) (trans. Chisholm E.) *A Life We Never Dared Hope For: Journal 1972-1974*. London & Oxford, UK. Mowbray: 24-25

² I have edited the original words of the translator, and hope this helps comprehension, since some of the text is quite clunky. I have also inserted one paragraph in blue being my own refection, which I hope you find helpful.

³ Forgive the seasonal allusion- My excuse is that it is now high season for my beloved butterflies!

⁴ But this phrase is new to me - quite wonderful - and perhaps a transliteration from the original French? 'Discarnate dreaming' - beautiful alliteration and sounds like a smart summary of error arising from Greek dualism...