

The archaisms are as prominent in this passage as they are in *Beowulf* but no one would doubt it was written between the wars because the language is the language of our common experience. Any critic could without much trouble locate the passage more precisely by the simple process of making comparisons with other things he had read in the period. Both *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Mr Weston's Good Wine* might be loosely described in Professor Tolkien's words, but what a difference in precise bearing and point: the extraordinary exaltation and profound religiosity—in the best sense—of the one and the bitter irony of the other. I am not saying we should translate *Beowulf* in the manner of Bunyan or T. F. Powys. I do not know what the idiom of the *Beowulf's poet* was, but I know I do not know, which is something.

(The second part of this article will appear next month.)

The Experience of Group Prayer by Simon Tugwell, O.P.

The only way to find out about the experience of a prayer meeting is obviously to take part; all I can do in these pages is to drop a few hints, in the hope that they will stir a chord or two, so that something will get across.

People sometimes talk as if prayer were a purely human act; but this is not Christian doctrine. Prayer is the act of *the believer*, the one who says 'I live now not I but Christ' (Gal. 2, 20). It is only in Spirit and Truth that we can offer prayer to the Father (John 4, 23). It is because Christ prays, that we, in the same Spirit, can pray. Prayer is a divine activity in which we, by grace, participate. (On all this, see Herbert McCabe's very lucid account in *Doctrine and Life*, August 1970.) It is always 'the Spirit and the Bride' who prays (cf. Apoc. 22, 17); we can only pray because God himself gives us prayer (as the Lord taught St Catherine expressly). All prayer, in so far as it is true prayer, is 'infused'; the contemplative is the one who *knows* it by experience. In our prayer groups, therefore, we aim to pray with the prayer that God himself gives us.

Now as we become more and more sanctified, our prayer too becomes more and more attuned to the prayer of Christ. That is what we aspire to. But we must avoid two antithetical traps. On the one hand, we must not assume forthwith that anything we utter at a prayer meeting is automatically underwritten by God; we may on occasion get a 'witness' of some kind to assure us that our prayer is truly willed by him, but that is a different matter. The other trap

is to sit and wait until God actually forces something out of us. Dom John Chapman used to reiterate: 'Pray as you can, not as you can't.' We must start where we are. There may be a great gulf set between our 'own' prayer and that of the Spirit, but both are important. The process of Christian maturing is, as the Fathers say, the 'mixing' of our spirit with the Holy Spirit, the mixing of the leaven of the kingdom into the lump of our human dough (Luke 13, 20f.). If either ingredient is missing, the process cannot go on. So it doesn't matter if, to start off with, there is much very human and imperfect prayer, and only a little prayer of the Spirit, and that as it were wrung from us in spite of ourselves. Pray as you can, not as you can't. It is only in so far as we offer ourselves to God as we actually are (not as we think we are, or think we ought to be) that he has the raw material to work on. Grace builds on nature; take away the nature, and grace cannot build.

So there is a double purpose at any meeting; one is that we should progress in our prayer, precisely by praying together, in the Spirit. The other is that the work of prayer should be accomplished. It shocks our philosophical sensitivity to admit that prayer makes any difference; but the whole witness of scripture and of the saints teaches us that it does. *Ask* and it shall be done to you. Just as in other ways, God gives us a perfectly real independence here: we do not *have* to pray; and if we do not pray, the work is not done.

This is obviously not to say that our creaturely desires influence God's will and make him change his mind. It is that God is Trinity. He is no static unchanging One, such as philosophy knows of. He is Father, source of all being and beauty and love, origin of all things; he is Son, eternal Will of the Father, in whom all things were made; he is Spirit, the gift given to men, poured out and distributed, so that his very unity seems at stake, unless we 'preserve' it (Eph. 4, 3); the Spirit yearns in us for the recapitulation of all things in Christ, when the kingdom is finally submitted to the Father, and God shall be all and in all. That is our God; and our prayer is part of the dynamism which is his truth, his life. Within God's will, in his Spirit and through his Son, we make our prayer. First and fundamentally, the prayer is always: Come, Lord Jesus. The prayer of the Spirit and the Bride is always for the coming of the kingdom.

But it is for the coming of the kingdom, not just in its perfection at the end of all things, but here and now in particular situations, where the victory of Christ is to be shown forth. We pray for healing, to show that in Christ all sickness is taken away. We pray for peace, that the unity of men achieved on the cross may be manifested. We pray for guidance, that God's will may be done. We pray for a nice afternoon, that God's children may rejoice, and again rejoice.

So, on the one hand, we ask God himself to choose and direct our prayer; and he does this, often in remarkable ways. We may for instance be just about to pray for something, when somebody else

chips in with just the words we were going to say. Or we may be led to pray for someone we know nothing about, only to learn later that some great work of grace has been achieved. Again, the Lord may give an unmistakable spiritual exultation when certain things are prayed for, that we may know that it is according to his will that we pray for them. There are many ways in which he moulds us and our prayer; only experience can teach, as only experience can testify, that the Lord *does* lead prayer, and does answer it, according to, and often far surpassing, the measure of our faith.

But, on the other hand, we expose our own desires and thoughts before God. Even dark thoughts and desires, when exposed to the light, tend to become light. It may be painful and humiliating to formulate, even to ourselves, what it is we want—the devil will often try to keep our desires just below the level of articulation. As soon as we formulate them, we see through them.

And, in between, but just as important, we present before God our love and concern for one another, in and beyond the group. Prayer will be found to be a natural and deep medium of communication; there is a real fellowship in the Holy Spirit, which becomes a known reality in prayer meetings, and overflows into the rest of our lives. Praying together can and should affect our whole relationship with people; we find ourselves completely at one with people we have, naturally, nothing in common with at all. A genuine, spiritual charity begins to flow in our hearts; and this is the only source for authentic Christian morality, as St Thomas (and St Paul, for that matter) insist. Without charity even the highest virtue is worthless; even benevolence and philanthropy are useless without charity. And this charity is something quite real in its own right, it is not the same as natural attraction or goodwill. It is a supernatural faculty developed in us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It may sound, from all this, that a prayer meeting is characterized by an austere 'supernatural' remoteness. Just the reverse! To be supernatural is precisely the fulfilment of our nature; and as we become filled with the Holy Spirit, we become much more profoundly human, more profoundly natural. It is quite common for there to be laughter and joy, or weeping, or even shouting and clapping, at prayer meetings; this is a natural response to the way the Lord is making himself present. There may be a joy too great to contain, or a yearning which passes beyond words; there may be a sorrow which breaks one's heart. Yet in all these, there is a peace, an integrity, which will always be found to distinguish the genuine article from the hysterical or induced (emotionalist) counterfeit.

To an 'outsider' this response may seem exaggerated at times, because he cannot 'see what it is all about'. For one of the things that happens, as one grows in the contemplative life, is that one becomes spiritually sensitive, sensitive to things that our normal senses cannot pick up. One becomes attuned to spiritual atmosphere,

one becomes a more subtle 'instrument', as the Fathers say, for the Spirit to play upon. We learn to note more and more subtly the working of the divine Spirit; we develop the ability to 'hear what the Lord God has to say'. This develops as we gain in the courage to follow 'hunches'; some of them turn out to be genuine promptings from God, others turn out not to be. If we never follow them at all, we shall never learn to distinguish them. But taking the risk, and making mistakes, we become wiser and more discerning.

Usually, the experiential awareness of God begins as 'heat', and only later develops into 'light', as the Fathers teach. That is to say, at first one knows only a sort of diffuse warmth, of varying intensity, which indicates that the Lord is present to us. This is what the Fathers call 'the feeling of God'. It may or may not lead to an emotional response; in itself it is very matter of fact. Any spirituality which does not lead to this kind of realistic feel for the things of God can safely be discounted. The contemplative is the one who is able to be realistic at every level—though his realism of course contradicts that of the 'man of the world' (cf. I Cor. 2, 9ff.).

Later the understanding is found to have matured in a new way, so that it moves more confidently than before in the realm of divine truth; we have, growing within us, 'the mind of Christ', we have an anointing which teaches us about everything 'so that we do not need anyone to instruct us' (I Cor. 2, 10–16, I John 2, 27).

This development is not necessarily easy; it may be extremely painful. Everyone has heard of dark nights, and this is a very real experience, for those who allow God to remake them in his own image. They may find that their whole world collapses, the world which gave them meaning and security; they feel lost and exposed. Worse, they find that what they used to regard as their Christian faith is shattered. God, in becoming more real, becomes decidedly less tame. He 'is not a pussy cat', as Anthony Bloom remarks. Depending on a person's previous attachment to the world, to his own private and tamed world, this weaning and remaking will be more or less prolonged, more or less continuous, more or less painful. God is taking over, and that means being carved up by the Word of God even to the dividing of soul and spirit (Heb. 4, 12). It is all too easy to chicken out at this stage; but if we remain faithful, God leads us out into a world of joy and freedom past anything we could have conceived of before. Because this new joy and freedom is his, it is dependent on nothing transient. We have been through death, and now there is nothing we need fear. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Of course, the old Adam doesn't just lie down quietly and die. There remains much in us that goes on screaming, that goes on being afraid, concerned, anxious, recalcitrant, that often seems to get the upper hand. But yet, after all, that turns out not to be the last word. Deeper in us even than ourselves, there *is*, there really is, this new

life, even in spite of our remaining fears, disobedience, everything like that; the new life goes on, the life which is Christ himself living in our hearts by faith. As we go on, this becomes more and more real, and so, step by painful step, takes control over more and more of our lives, dragging us, forcing us, into the light and freedom of the sons of God.

Increasing sensitivity to the Holy Spirit makes us also more sensitive to other things too. As we become aware of freedom, we become proportionately aware also of bondage. We become aware of our moral life in a completely new light. The concern to correct our behaviour gives way to a desire to oust all that holds us inwardly in bondage. It is not so much our outward acts that we tackle, as our inward 'passions', which we feel, increasingly, to be alien, even demonic. At first this may even result in a deterioration in our behaviour; this is the price we pay for increasing awareness and honesty. Things we had previously repressed very successfully now emerge; only so do the murky depths become exposed to the light of Christ. Obviously this is not to say that we now let every impulse have free rein! Only, now that we are concerned with a much deeper level of moral awareness, we have much less energy to spare on keeping up appearances. Our behaviour, in becoming more integrated, inevitably becomes more transparent—a mixed blessing for most of us! But never mind. It is probably only our pride that suffers; other people are much more hurt by our hypocritical kindnesses than by an honest insult. Christ comes for the sinner, and the more we know, really know, experience ourselves to be sinners, the closer we can come to Christ. We give up our own attempts to be righteous, and 'await' a righteousness which he will give us in his own good time (Rom. 10, 3; Gal. 5, 5).

This is all very frightening, though hardly news. But the suffering is just not worth balancing against the glory. Even now, so far from perfection as we are, such gifts are lavished upon us! There can be a joy in the Lord which reaches down to the very depth of our souls, and reaches up in praise to the very throne of heaven. Praise is something very few of us know much about; yet it is common in prayer meetings for a whole group to be caught up in praise, sometimes with a clear awareness of fellowship with the holy angels whose whole life is to praise God. Similarly with thanksgiving; people experience quite unexpectedly sometimes a great gift of thanksgiving even in acute suffering. This is a wonderful experience; it does not in any way deny the suffering, but yet you cannot, for the moment, help saying over and over again 'Thank you' to God. Thank God *at all times*, as St Paul said (I Thess. 5, 18).

'But how do you know it's not just hysteria? Isn't it sheer emotionalism? Isn't it perhaps from the devil?' These are real questions, even if sometimes they are asked in a spirit of fear and hostility, and they deserve a fuller answer than I can give here. But

these few remarks may help to clarify the issue, and I hope, indirectly, that an answer will emerge in the course of subsequent articles.

The fully free human act is one in which every level of our being is integrated and harmonious, and in which we are at one with the whole environment, and with the nature implanted in us by our creator. But we are fallen from our nature, into disharmony with our environment and disintegration within ourselves. The spiritual life is the gradual restoration of harmony and wholeness, by the grace of God, until we attain to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Eph. 4, 13).

It is only God, according to the scholastics, who can move us from within without in any way detracting from our freedom. Any manifestation that is from God will therefore leave us entirely free—more so than we were before. It will leave us at peace, humble under the mighty hand of God, and deeply tranquil. A manifestation that comes simply from a bit of ourselves, whether from a conscious attempt to work ourselves up or from a stray bit of subconscious (as in hysteria) will give us and/or others a feeling of strain and compulsion, and will leave us feeling het up and awkward, and very conscious of ‘I’ (aren’t I a good mystic?). Similarly with diabolical influence.

Humility and tranquillity cannot be counterfeited. Once you have known the real thing, you need not seriously fear delusion, according to the Fathers, provided you never let go of humility. Accept even the fact that you are proud, if you are, and you will have turned it towards humility. Humility is simply a direct, undisguised, objective recognition of reality. Reality is God’s greatest ally. As long as we simply let the facts be, whatever they are, we are in God’s hands, and he will keep us from error and bewitchment. So we should cultivate a cool, detached equilibrium, and then we shall easily learn to recognize in ourselves, or at least in each other, anything that is false or affected.

The chief thing to be watched in a prayer meeting is ‘short-circuiting’. It is all too easy to say ‘Praise God!’ at the top of your voice simply because somebody else has done it. It is easy to pick up an external idiom of prayer without really entering into prayer. We should learn a deep inner silence, so that anything we say—or sing or shout—comes from deep down; as deep as we can manage (once again, start where you are!). That won’t make it infallible, but it will mean that our prayer is always reaching deeper and deeper down, till eventually it will be fully rooted in God’s own will. One thing we can be sure of: anything that is not fully *our* prayer, will not be *God’s* prayer either.

At times it may be very painful, we may feel ourselves the odd one out, when everybody else seems caught up in praise and we are silent, dumb. Never mind! We are there to wait upon God, not

upon each other. Say what is in your heart, not what is in your ears. Excitement is all very exciting; but our God is a God of peace. 'In the stillness of your heart you will know him.'

Interchurch Marriages by Martin Reardon

Some comments by an Anglican in the light of a Directory by the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales based upon the Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio on 31st March, 1970, by His Holiness Pope Paul VI determining Norms for Mixed Marriages¹

Until the publication last year of the *Motu Proprio* and the *Directory by the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales* mixed marriages looked very different to different people. It depended where you stood. In fact there can be few states of life which appeared so different according to viewpoint.

If you were an average Roman Catholic priest or bishop brought up in the One True Church with a firm Catholic tradition, they were a major problem. More than half your marriages were mixed and the majority of the non-Catholic partners were merely nominal Christians. One of your primary concerns must have been that the Catholic partner continued to practise his or her faith and the children were brought up as Catholics. The Catholic Church in this country has been the only major Church which has increased in numbers in recent years, and, apart from the Irish immigration, the children of mixed marriages have probably accounted for the largest part of this increase.

If you were an average Anglican priest or bishop brought up in a firm Anglican tradition, mixed marriages with Roman Catholics were a minor, but very sharp, problem. You came across few of them where the Roman Catholic practised his religion, but the ones you did meet showed that 'One True Church of Christ' at its most intransigent, intolerant of the conscience of the Anglican partner. You were tempted to be as intolerant in return, leaving the couple as bewildered and unhappy pawns of a different colour trying to make love in the middle of an ecclesiastical game of chess.

If you were a starry-eyed couple very much in love, you were puzzled what all the fuss was about. It was hard enough to imagine yourselves with a child in your arms, let alone considering the problem of his religious upbringing. Better just sign on the dotted

¹Available from the Catholic Truth Society.