

R.B 72 : GOOD ZEAL AND PRAYER— MAKING THE RAINBOW
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‘One night towards the end of his life, long before the night office began, St. Benedict stood at his cell window watching and praying while his monks slept. Suddenly he beheld a flood of light shining down from above, more brilliant than the sun. Every trace of darkness vanished. Another remarkable sight followed: the whole world was gathered up before his eyes in what appeared to be a single ray of light.’¹

This story from the *Dialogues* of St Gregory tells us that Benedict had a mystical experience of the Word as ‘ the true light....through whom all things come into being.....and from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace’². Our call as Christians is to see the glory of the Word, ‘ the glory that he has from the Father as only Son, full of grace and truth.. ’³ When we came knocking at the door of the monastery we may have had no clear idea of what we were looking for— but the God of light and love was calling us— and never ceases to call us ‘ out of darkness into his wonderful light . ’⁴

In this Symposium we are sharing our experiences of the Light — as Good Zeal— ‘ the high point of the Rule, or the key with which we can live the whole Rule.’⁵ Each of our speakers has led us into the light of Christ’s love where we all stand— waiting for the gift of his Spirit to enable us to love, to serve and to pray. Gregory presents Benedict in the *Dialogues* as a man of prayer, ‘ always beholding himself in the presence of his Creator ’⁶ : ‘ possessing the Spirit of the Saviour who fills the hearts of the faithful by granting them the fruits of his Redemption. ’⁷ Benedict tells us that whatever work we do— we must ‘ pray most earnestly beforehand’⁸ — good works are God’s work, not ours .

In this paper , I shall make few direct references to the previous papers. My mandate was to present the contemplative dimension of Good Zeal. As I meditated on the papers, I was drawn back again and again to the source, ‘ the blessed spirit of prayer.’⁹ I shall reflect on prayer within the monastic and English mystical traditions, briefly indicating how these show us the straight way to God, the origin of all Good Zeal and life-giving relationships.

¹St Gregory :*Dialogues* : 35

²St John 1: 9: 10: 16

³John 1:14

⁴1 Peter 2:4

⁵Sr Aquinata Böckmann O.S.B :R.B.72 *What Does Good Zeal mean for St Benedict ?*:Section 2 p 4

⁶St Gregory : *Dialogues* 3

⁷St Gregory : *ibid* : 8

⁸R.B. *Prologue* :v 4

⁹Prayer of Augustine Baker: *May the blessed spirit of prayer rest upon us all.*

Now let us return to Benedict's vision in the night.

In the *Dialogues* St Gregory treats this story as a PARABLE. He explains thus to Peter the deacon : ' All creation appears small to one who sees the Creator. The light of holy contemplation enlarges and expands the mind in God until it stands above the world; as it is drawn upward in his light, all its inner powers unfold .'¹⁰ The parable tells us something about prayer: to pray is to be caught up into the light of God who sees all his creation as ' very good' — in this simple seeing, creation is made new, and made one— God is seen in all things. Like Moses we begin to reflect the light ever transformed. We understand that after the work of creation God ' rested' — contemplated the beauty and unity of all he had made¹¹. We know that we are held in existence by his contemplative gaze. Without it the world would fall into nothingness, return to empty chaos:

You hide you face, they are dismayed,
You take back your spirit, they die.....
You send forth your spirit, they are created,
And you renew the face of the earth.¹²

Benedict himself, however, being a wise man, says only a few words on prayer itself. His first concerns are practical— in the monastery there must be specified regular times for prayer — place for prayer— silence — and lectio in preparation for prayer. All the elements that form the way of monastic CONVERSATIO — are designed to foster an ATTITUDE of PRAYERFULNESS. The ancient monks referred to a state of continual prayer— not to saying prayers all the time. Walking the arduous path of asceticism, self-knowledge, solitude, community, obedience, stability, self-forgetfulness, brings about a receptivity to the grace of prayer. In chapters 20 and 52 of the Rule we find Benedict distilling the teaching of Cassian and the early Fathers . To understand and practise chapter 72— we must be well experienced in this prayer tradition which speaks of —

PURITAS CORDE INTENTIO CORDIS COMPUNCTIO CORDIS

Three times in the five verses of chapter 20 he speaks of PURE prayer— prayer that flows from an undivided heart— PURITAS CORDE — fully possessed by God's love, INTENTIO CORDIS— a single God-ward movement of the heart. COMPUNCTIO CORDIS— prayer from a heart sensitive to the 'prickings' of the Spirit— those insights which liberate us from complacency and delusion, and renew our desire for God.

We can gain an insight into what this teaching on pure prayer means by turning to the English mystical tradition. They call prayer a 'work': — keeping a 'naked intent' (intentio cordis) directed towards God—*The Cloud of Unknowing tells us* : ' never give up your naked intent: beat away this cloud of unknowing between you and God with that sharp dart of longing love.....'¹³ Discipline of the will and perseverance are demanded.

¹⁰Gregory :*Dialogues* :35

¹¹Genesis 2: 2

¹²Psalms 103 : vv 29- 30

¹³*Cloud of Unknowing*. Translated Clifton Wolters Penguin Press: ch 20

Benedict reflects on the gift of time given us for growth — he assures us that God will be patient with us — lengthen our days — that we may enjoy living in his presence¹⁴. The mystics say the same:

God shows us that time is precious, for he never gives two moments of time side by side, but always in succession. To do otherwise he would have to alter the whole of creation. Time is for man— not man for time. And God, who orders nature, fitted time in with the nature of man, whose natural impulses occur one at a time.¹⁵

One sign of growth in prayerfulness is an awareness of God acting in every situation— even the most disturbing and challenging— along with a willingness to respond ‘ in quietness and in trust’.¹⁶

The topic Benedict has most to say about — HUMILITY— is related to prayerfulness. On each of the twelve steps we are invited into another level of awareness of God — and self-forgetfulness. On the twelfth step — our entire being is possessed by God’s presence— we have ‘ arrived at that perfect love of God which casts out all fear....we observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue’.¹⁷

The promise made by Benedict at the end of the *Prologue* has been honoured— by the power of the Spirit, our hearts are enlarged and we run in the light of Christ with inexpressible delight.

The Cloud of Unknowing instructs us on the way of humility—

You who set out to be contemplative, choose rather to be humbled by the unimaginable greatness and incomparable perfection of God rather than by your own wretchedness and imperfection. In other words, look more to God’s worthiness than your own worthlessness. To the perfectly humble there is nothing lacking. For they have God in whom is all abundance, and whoever has him— needs nothing else in this life.¹⁸

Throughout our lives as we tread the twelve steps over and over again, we must bear in mind that it is God who teaches us to pray and we need to be docile, accepting that God teaches in mysterious ways--his teaching must make us supple so that we can recognise him whether he comes in the gentle breeze or the majestic storm and whirlwind. The *Cloud* tells us that we must allow the Holy Spirit to lead and deal with us in prayer as he wills.

Be the tree: let it be the carpenter. Be the house, and let it be the householder who lives there. Be willing to be blind, and give up all longing to know the why and how, for knowing will be more of a hindrance than a help. It is enough that

¹⁴R.B. *Prologue* :v 37

¹⁵*Cloud of Unknowing* : op cit : ch 4

¹⁶*Isaiah* 30 : 15

¹⁷R.B .7: vv 68-70

¹⁸*Cloud of Unknowing*: op cit : Ch 23

you should feel moved lovingly by you know not what, and that in this inward urge you have no real thought for anything less than God, and that your desire is steadily and simply turned towards him.¹⁹

The monastic tradition of prayer is rooted in our commitment to ‘prefer nothing whatever to the love of Christ’²⁰. Our prayer is his— his is ours, or rather we desire to make his prayer our own. In the gospel account of the Transfiguration, we see his *INTENTIO CORDIS*. Dom Demetrius Dumm of St Vincent’s Archabbey, Latrobe, in a retreat to our community, shed new light on this story— something like this — Jesus’ awareness of the Father’s love was so powerful that even his clothes shone whiter ‘ than any earthly bleacher could make them’²¹ — he became pure light. In that light he understood himself as *THE BELOVED*— and that his mission to save his people would be by love and self emptying— and that this experience of Jesus was to be ours also. By understanding ourselves in prayer as *BELOVED* — we would understand our mission— and fulfil it with ‘ the inexpressible delight of love’²². In prayer, one of our English mystics, Julian of Norwich, was told by the Lord : ‘ It is a joy, a bliss, and an endless liking to me that ever I suffered passion for you. And if I could suffer more, I would suffer more’²³

In our times, perhaps the greatest challenge in prayer is for us to truly accept and believe that we are *BELOVED*— so intensely loved by God that his cruel death in the flesh was all joy as he looked into his wounded side and saw : ‘ a fair and delightful place, large enough for all people be saved, to rest in peace and love’²⁴. In truth we are called to *see only Jesus*; to turn our eyes constantly to Jesus — to allow him to share with us his knowledge and security as *THE BELOVED*.

The apostle Barnabas has been presented to us as a living example of this inner freedom that comes from ‘ willingly giving over our personhood to the mastery of Christ.’ Barnabas found his peace and security from ‘ knowing himself personally chosen and loved by God. ’²⁵ This is the true source of good zeal— the only indestructible source.

To know ourselves deeply loved by God, so deeply loved that we can become channels of his love for others is our deepest desire. To allow this desire to transform us we must fix our eyes, ears and hearts on the vision of the humble Christ who allowed himself to be broken for us :

Who being in the form of God,
did not count his equality with God
something to be grasped.

¹⁹*Cloud* : op cit : Ch 34

²⁰R.B. 4:21

²¹*Mark* 9:4

²²R.B. *Prologue* : v 49

²³Julian of Norwich :*Revelations of Divine Love*: trans James WalshS.J (. Burns/Oates) Ch 22 p 83

²⁴Julian of Norwich : *Revelations* op cit Ch 24 p 87

²⁵Abbot Jerome Kodell OSB RB 72 *How Does a monk advance in Good zeal ? : The Ascetical Dimension of Community Life* : pp 7 and 11

But he emptied himself
taking the form of a slave,
becoming as human beings are;
and being in every way like a human being,
he was humbler yet,
even to accepting death, death on a cross.²⁶

We are called to this in community where we live among the *sisters for whom Christ died* and are called to imitate this self-giving love— with the joy of good zeal— which recognises Christ, first of all in ourselves and then in each other, however much disguised he may be. We exercise this love in prayer : — in the liturgy by being the body of Christ praying in and with him— and in our personal prayer when we love ‘ all people in God just as we love ourselves’. The *Cloud* explains that in contemplative prayer:

The perfect contemplative holds no one in special regard, be he kinsman, stranger, friend or foe. For all men alike are his brothers, and none strangers. He considers all his friends and none his foes. To such an extent that even those who hurt or injure him he reckons as his special friends, and he is moved to wish for them as much good as he would for his dearest friend.²⁷

Of its nature this prayer is the most powerful form of evangelisation—

The whole of mankind is wonderfully helped by what you are doing, in ways you do not understand. Yes, the very souls in purgatory find their pain eased by virtue of your work.²⁸

In such prayer we are one in mind and spirit with Christ, through the Holy Spirit in the love of the Father. This is the perfection of good zeal .Then, as John Cassian wrote:

God shall be all our love, all we desire and seek and follow, all we think, all our life and speech and breath. The unity which now is between Father and Son shall be poured into our feelings and our minds: and as he loves us with a pure, sincere, unbreakable charity, we on our side shall be linked with him by a lasting affection that nothing can spoil. In that union, whatever we breathe or think or speak is God.²⁹

Cardinal Hume, writing as abbot of Ampleforth , took the image of Christ’s kenosis from *Philippians* and applied it to the practical challenge of community life. He considered that ‘the greatest abnegation of self is to be able to throw oneself into the monastic life and work with enthusiasm in this age when self-criticism and questioning can dispose us to become insufficiently involved.’ Such a kenosis involves going out of ourselves to give mutual encouragement and example—. The effects of such costly self-giving reach beyond the boundaries of the community. Basil Hume concluded: ‘ If we can ‘ deny ourselves and throw ourselves into whatever is going on, whole heartedly and enthusiastically, even when we have mental reservations: this is a kenosis, a self-emptying. A quality which is demand of

²⁶*Philippians 2: 6-8*

²⁷*Cloud of Unknowing* :op cit : ch 24

²⁸*Cloud of Unknowing* : op cit ch 3

²⁹Cassian — quoted in *John Cassian* by Owen Chadwick. C.U.P. 1968 p 237

us in the Church today'³⁰

Basil Hume is using the word 'enthusiasm' here in its true meaning, from the Greek — *entheos*— or 'God possessed'. We know that monasteries cannot survive on emotional 'highs' — but this enthusiasm comes from the Holy Spirit working within and through us. Thomas Merton, writing after many years of monastic life, affirms the same belief:

Now I am a grown- up monk, I have no time for anything but essentials. The only essential is not an idea or an ideal: it is God himself, who cannot be found by weighing the present against the future or the past, but only by sinking into the heart of the present as it is.³¹

As we sink into the present in this aula today — we too see a vision— a ray of light— a RAINBOW . It signifies God's eternal covenant with Ancient Israel never to let his creation descend into chaos— and it also points towards the New Covenant:

In their minds I shall plant my laws
writing them on their hearts...
they will know me
from the least to the greatest.³²

This paper rainbow is also a sign and fruit of Good Zeal— the zeal of many who have prepared for this Symposium. When asked, 18 months ago, to prepare a back-drop screen for this Symposium to illustrate GOOD ZEAL, I was at a loss ! A chaos moment...

I made an appointment to see Sr Aquinata... I wanted to find out how she taught her students about Good Zeal. She explained how she taught with colour... rainbow colours...and I knew that our back drop screen had to be a rainbow. Over the last months numerous e-mails have been exchanged between Sant' Anselmo and Stanbrook attempting to establish the position, size and colours of the screen— to define the rainbow ! Stephen, an artist friend offered to help and carried all the materials here from England— Thanks to his good zeal — and that of those who helped us to assemble it— the rainbow has appeared.

Like the monastic tradition of prayer— the phenomenon of the rainbow has been studied and written about at length. Its source is pure light. Pure light is white and comes to us in straight parallel rays from the sun. The colours of the rainbow are caused by the white light being reflected and refracted — broken — by the many drops of water which fall in showers of rain. The rainbow is only visible with the sun behind us— it is not an OBJECT in the sky— it is a private and personal phenomenon. If two people stand side by side, each sees their own rainbow. The rainbow is an image of the sun— its light broken by rain — deflected into each human eye.

Here is another parable. Every rainbow is an image of community. As the rainbow is only visible when the sun is behind us—so we cannot see and serve the community as it truly is

³⁰Basil Hume :*Searching for God*. Hodder and Stoughton p 24

³¹Thomas Merton :*the Sign of Jonas* p 319

³²*Hebrews 8: 10* Quoting *Jeremiah 31: 33*

unless we stand in Christ, as ‘our personal centre’³³. Our eyes have to be aligned with his, which ‘burn with the flame of love’.³⁴ The innumerable drops of water and the full spectrum of colour which form the one bow is a perfect illustration of community.

But even more can be said of the rainbow. As Solomon tells us : ‘From the great beauty of created things, we are able to contemplate their author.’³⁵ The rainbow represents Christ— reflection of the Father— Light from Light— Light of the World— whose body was broken for us ³⁶ In the breaking of the Light he becomes our Covenant with the Father.

The final eschatological community of love is a community of complete sharing, complete openness and mutuality, in which my whole being, my whole ego is related to others and at the service of others— and finds the fullness of joy in giving and self-giving. It is not static, but a community of continuing action, inter-action, recognition and companionship. Through Christ community is created continuously.

Which is why the foundation must be prayer— for only Christ’s love has the power to free us to become our true selves. Dom Richard Byrne’s explanation will find an echo in our hearts:

As a Christian I tend towards a life of unceasing prayer because I am called to a life of unceasing care. I cannot care on my own; my experience of sin and weakness is the experience of my radical inability to care. Left to myself I am woefully lacking in love for God and my brother. Therefore I desire love, for I need love at each moment. My unceasing prayer is my unceasing desire for love: for the love which is poured into my heart by the Holy Spirit which is given to us. Unceasing prayer is the actual or virtual expression of my desire for the gift of God’s love whereby I may love him in return and care for his will in the sacrament of the present moment.³⁷

Here is our rainbow. We trust that the interaction of prayer and community living will allow Christ to bring us ‘all alike to life everlasting’³⁸.

In the eternal city of Jerusalem, lit only by the radiant glory of God, a rainbow encircles his throne. There all creation is made new in love. Each of the blessed will see the fruit of love— each will know the debt owed to the love of others— mysteries beyond our imagination in this life. But in the next life, St Thérèse of Lisieux assures us, we *will* understand, for ‘In heaven’, she tells us, ‘we shall never be greeted by stares of indifference; for all the elect will recognise how they owe each other the graces which have brought them glory. How clearly we shall see that everything comes from the good God’³⁹

³³Sr Aquina Böckmann OSB : *R.B. 72 : What Does Good Zeal mean for St. Benedict ?* P3

³⁴*Revelation 1:14*

³⁵*Wisdom 13:4*

³⁶*1 Cor 11:24*

³⁷Richard Byrne OCSO *Living the Contemplative Dimension of Everyday Life* (Master’s Thesis 1973)printed by the Poor Clares, Arundel p 278

³⁸R.B. *Ch 72:12*

³⁹Hans Urs von Balthasar : trans Donald Nicholl : *Thérèse of Lisieux* (Sheed and Ward) p 142