

Praying and Thinking

The first Capella Regalis Summer Colloquium

Wednesday July 7 to Tuesday July 13, 2010

"We ought to offer a cock to Asclepius. See to it and do not forget"

Not all thinking is praying nor is all prayer thinking, and sometimes one opposes itself to the other for the other's sake, but they are mutually implicated. Our Summer colloquium will explore aspects of this implication.

Wednesday July 7, "Problematic to Praying and Thinking: mutual implication", Wayne Hankey

Thursday, July 8, "Prayer, the Context of Reason"

Friday, July 9, "Prayer and the Crisis of Reason"

Monday, July 12, "Prayer, the Ground of Reason"

Tuesday, July 13, "Prayer and the Consummation of Reason"

Each of the sessions will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the King's Chapel and will be followed by Compline. Suitable imbibing will ensue in the Deanery. After the first introductory talk, all the colloquia will be discussions dependent on prearranged interventions by the participants. These interventions will be prepared short talks of from five to twelve minutes long. We hope for at least two or three each evening. If you wish to intervene, please write Wayne Hankey at Wayne.Hankey@Dal.Ca

Some of you will associate one or more of these topics with texts you have studied from Plato, Philo, Plotinus, Iamblichus, Augustine, Proclus, Boethius, Dionysius, Eriugena, Anselm, Avicenna, al-Ghazzali, Maimonides, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Dante, Eckhart, or Cusanus, for example. Interventions attempting to bring these texts into our common thinking will be welcome, but proposals of other kinds are very welcome and will be most sympathetically considered.

Wayne Hankey
Nicholas Hatt
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Praying and Thinking

Problematic to Praying and Thinking: mutual implication

Wednesday July 7

Wayne Hankey

Not all thinking is praying nor is all prayer thinking, and sometimes one opposes itself to the other for the other's sake, but they are mutually implicated.

I. What is thinking and What is praying?

- a) *God is*. The hope in prayer.
- b) Derrida, in a contrast he makes to Heidegger, says that he never ceases to pray and weep in his "religion without religion." Therein, he "makes truth."
- c) Pascal: "Fire: God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the 'philosophes et des savants'." *Pensées Section IV*.
- d) Jean-Luc Marion: Unifies the affirmation of prayer and negation of apophatic theology, Marion grounds the "de-nomination" of Christian mystical theology in a God who is nameless by excess.

- e) Dionysius. Despite Marion's polemics, the move to God beyond affirmation and negation is the position of Dionysius and Damascius, the last head of Plato's Academy. The beyond allows the affirmation, and the *Divine Names* is, like Augustine's book, a *Confession*, a prayer or hymn of praise by which what is hymned is created in the soul.

II. Prayer, the Context of Reason

- a) Halifax (Kerr and Puxley) and Toronto (Synan and Hay) in the 60s
- b) FYP and High Mass
- c) Parmenides: "The mares that carry me as far as my heart ever aspires ...brought me to the far-famed road of the god...Come and I will tell you...the only ways of enquiry are to be thought of: The one that it is and that it is impossible for it not to be."
- d) Pythagoras: a man in the 6th century BC regarded later as the founder of mathematics, number symbolism, doctrines of immortality and the afterlife, rules for an ascetic life which was lived in community.
- e) Jews as a Philosophical people: Having discovered a people led by priests and obeying the Law coming directly from the Divinity, the Greeks ranged the Jews beside the Indian Brahmins and Persian Magi. The Jews are a "philosophic race."
- f) Essenes: seem to have introduced something of the ideas and forms of life of Greek Pythagoreanism into Judaism and are called a philosophical sect by Josephus.
- g) Alexandrian Therapeutae: *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria*. Philo, *On the Contemplative Life*: this nocturnal festival is celebrated in the following manner: they all stand up together, and in the middle of the entertainment two choruses are formed at first, the one of men and the other of women...Then they sing hymns which have been composed in honor of God in many metres and tunes, at one time all singing together, and at another moving their hands and dancing in corresponding harmony... like persons in the bacchanalian revels, drinking the pure wine of the love of God
- h) Iamblichus: Philosophy presupposes "an innate knowledge of the gods [which] is co-existent with our very essence; and this knowledge is superior to all judgment and deliberate choice, and subsists prior to reason and demonstration." Prayer, which has multiple forms adapted by the gods to every human condition, awakens what is innate and both enables philosophy and draws us beyond it.
- i) Proclus: organised the Academy as a kind of monastery. Its programme of study initiated its members step by step into contemplation within a context of prayer. The philosophy of Plato was "mystagogy", an "initiation into the holy mysteries themselves...installed, for eternity, in the home of the gods on High." His own *Elements of Theology* may be considered "metaphysics as spiritual exercise."
- j) Christian monasticism: In ancient and mediaeval monasticism, philosophy does not designate a theory or a way of knowing but a lived wisdom, a manner of life according to reason, that is the *Logos*. The monks have also taken over the spiritual exercises of the pagan schools, of the Cynics, Skeptics, Epicureans as well as the Platonists and Aristotelians. Jean LeClercq and Pierre Hadot.

III. Prayer and the Crisis of Reason

- a) Plotinus: *Enn* 5.1.6: "In venturing an answer, we first invoke God Himself, not in loud word but in that way of prayer which is always within our power, leaning in soul towards Him by aspiration, alone towards the alone."
- b) Boethius: At the exact centre of the *Consolation*, in a beautiful poem fashioned from elements of the Platonic genesis, the *Timaeus*, Philosophy prays to the "creator of heaven and earth". The prayer converts the prisoner towards God's simple eternity of infinite possession by turning him from reason which divides what is one. He moves to the perspective of the One in which the mind is led from unity to goodness to God so as to explain why "every happy man is a god" (*Cons.* III.x).

- c) Anselm recognises that when seeking _____ to see the face of God he fell on himself as obstacle. The only solution is the prayer by which God relieves him of himself, or lifts him up from himself: *Releva me de me ad te* (cap. 18). God reveals himself when the human lifts itself and is lifted in prayer, but such prayer issues from despair.

IV. Prayer and the Ground of Reason

- a) Moses Maimonides: “The first thing you must do is this: Turn your thoughts away from everything while you read Shema.” “The Torah distinctly states that the highest kind of worship...is only possible after the acquisition of the knowledge of God.”
- b) Augustine: Cicero’s exhortation to philosophy, his feelings were changed. It changed his experience, religious practice, values, and desires in respect to God himself: “It altered my prayers, and created in me different purposes and desires.” Inflamed by philosophy, Augustine repented his vain hopes; in their place, he writes: “I lusted for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardour of the heart.”
- c) Bonaventure: “To begin with, the first principle from Whom all illumination descends...I call upon our Lord Jesus Christ, that by the intercession of the most holy Virgin Mary, mother of God Himself and of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and of the blessed Francis, our father and leader...who wished for peace in every greeting, yearned for ecstatic peace in every moment of contemplation.”

V. Prayer and the Consummation of Reason

- a) Ibn Tufayl “He emulated...by not pursuing his imagination and exerted all his strength not to think of anything but Him....To help himself achieve this he spun about himself..
- b) Dante: every one of the three canticles (*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*) ends with the word “stars”. The ultimate aim of the *Comedy* is that we be moved by and in the cosmic order, perfect in the heavens. “And then we emerged to see the stars again” *Inferno* XXXIV, 139 “Clear and ready to move up to the stars” *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 145, “the love which moves the sun and the other stars” *Paradiso* XXXIII, 145.