Priest
Sergei Koudy

On Presence and Union

A Mystical Treatise

De Praesentia et Unione

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A Mystical Treatise
on God and the Human Person

De Praesentia et Unione



Life for God

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Not through comprehension, but through presence.

IN THE BEGINNING

This book is about the human person as a place of Divine presence.

The distinction between God and Creation does not mean a rupture. God does not become part of the world, nor does the world remain outside His presence. How a person may receive this presence and live by it is the question from which this treatise unfolds.

The words ‘place’, ‘capacity’, ‘transparency’ and ‘breath’ help us approach this question. They do not exhaust what they point towards. Their meaning unfolds gradually, in the movement from chapter to chapter.

These pages ask for unhurried attention. At times, a line asks us to pause. At times, we must return to it to hear more than we understood at first.

Chapter 1

ON THE HUMAN PERSON AS A PLACE OF PRESENCE

God is—
not as a being among beings,
nor as a cause among causes,
but as the Absolute,
beyond being and non-being.

He is not enclosed in Creation,
for He is not limited by it;
nor is He outside Creation,
for there is no place
where He is not.

And yet the created world,
being created,
cannot contain God,
as the created
cannot contain the uncreated.

Here the mystery arises:
God pervades all,
and yet
the world may not know Him.

Not because
God is absent from the world,
but because
His presence has not yet been
freely received
and revealed from within.

And then God creates the human person.

Not out of necessity for Himself,
for the Absolute has no need;
nor as an addition to fullness,
for fullness cannot increase.

But the human person is created
in the image and likeness,
so that Creation, unable
by nature to contain the uncreated,
might freely receive
and reveal His presence.

The human person belongs to the world
and stands within it
as part of Creation.

And yet
the world does not exhaust him,
for he bears within himself the image of Him
Who is above the world.

In the human person, God
does not become created,
nor does the human person become God
in essence.

But in the human person
the transcendent becomes manifest,
and the immanent—recognized.

For God is present in the world
not as part of the world,
but as the One
Who may be known.

Were there no human person,
God would be
no less the Absolute,
but the world would remain voiceless.

For the Absolute
does not lose Himself
when He is not known.

But the world remains without an answer
when there is no one within it
capable of freely receiving
and revealing presence.

And so the human path
is not a path of bringing God near,
for God is not far away.

It is a path of purifying the capacity to receive.

When a person becomes
what he was created to be,
God neither comes
nor goes.

He simply
ceases to be hidden.

And then the Absolute
remains the Absolute,
and the world—the world,
and between them
there is no longer a rupture.

For the rupture was
not in God
and not in the world,
but in the person's self-enclosure,
within which the possessive self
still obscured
the image of God.

Chapter 2

ON CHRIST
AS THE FULLNESS OF UNION

What had been placed
in the human person as image
remained within him
unfulfilled.

For the human person was created
as a capacity to receive,
but not as the measure of fullness.

He could receive,
but by his own measure
he could not make union perfect.

For the created,
even when transparent,
remains created,
and the image is not the fullness.

Therefore the union
to which the human person was called
could not be fulfilled
by human ascent alone.

And then God does
what the human person cannot do.

The Word becomes flesh.

Not because
God lacked the world,
nor because
the Absolute had changed,
but because
God Himself reveals within Creation
that union
which no created measure
could bring about.

In Christ,
God does not enter the world
as part of the world,
nor does He relinquish
His transcendence.

He is above the world,
while remaining in the world,
and in the world—
without ceasing to be above it.

For in Christ
there is no mingling of essences
and no division of presence.

God remains God,
the human remains human,
and in Him
the rupture ceases to be a rupture.

If the human person was created
as the possibility of union,
then Christ is
union
become reality,
but not through human ascent.

Christ is—
not a symbol,
not an image among images,
but the foundation
and fullness of the image.

For in Him
the transcendent
does not lose its height,
and the immanent
does not lose its reality.

And so Christ
is not an example of what
the human person
can attain alone.

He is the fullness
in which the human
is wholly disclosed.

In Him it becomes manifest
that the human person was conceived
not as a limit,
but as a path.

And if in the first human being
the image was hidden,
then in Christ
it became light.

And this light
does not abolish darkness by force,
but makes it needless.

And so the path to Christ
is neither flight from the world
nor dissolution in the Absolute.

It is the human person's return
not to himself
as the source,
but to the truth of himself
revealed in Christ:
to what
he was conceived to be
before the foundation of the world.

And then God
does not become nearer,
for He was not far away.

And the human person
does not become someone else,
for he becomes
what he was created to be.

And in this
the Absolute remains the Absolute,
and Creation—Creation,
and between them
there is no longer a contradiction.

For in the incarnate Word
the Divine and the human
were united
without losing their distinction—
not through human ascent,
but through the Incarnation of God.

Chapter 3

ON THE BODY AS A FORM OF PRESENCE

The Word became flesh.

And therefore flesh
cannot be left
outside union.

The spirit does not belong to the body.

But neither does the body
belong to the spirit
as a thing.

It is given to the spirit
not as a thing to an owner,
but as Creation to a keeper.

For the invisible within a person
does not become visible
without the body.

Without the body,
thought does not become word,
mercy—touch,
nor love—a deed
that enters the world.

The body is that
through which a person
belongs inseparably
to visible Creation,
and Creation
becomes part of his path.

Therefore the spirit
does not despise the body.

It cares for that
through which it can
be present.

But to care for
does not mean to submit to.

The body changes,
demands,
suffers
and returns to the earth
from which it was taken.

If a person follows
only its movement,
then what was given to him
becomes that
which possesses him.

And then the order of the image
is reversed:
the invisible serves the visible,
and the spirit becomes a captive of that
which it was meant to keep.

But the primacy of the spirit
is not violence against the body.

For violence
does not liberate matter,
but merely makes it
the site of another power.

The spirit takes the lead
when it receives the body
not as property,
but as something entrusted to it.

It does not suppress the body,
but gives it direction.

It does not reject the body's frailty,
but bears it.

It does not demand eternity of the body,
but allows the temporal
to become a place of the eternal.

Thus within a person
the mystery of presence is disclosed:
what is not exhausted by matter
becomes manifest in it
without becoming matter.

And matter,
without ceasing to be material,
becomes capable
of bearing the invisible.

Therefore the body
is no less worthy
than the spirit.

It is otherwise.

The spirit directs.
The body embodies.

And only together
do they form the human person,
in whom the transcendent
does not become part of the world,
but is present in the world
as life.

‘Mine’,
forgetting the Giver,
stands between spirit
and body.

‘Mine’
desires to possess
both spirit
and body.

But the fulfilment of the spirit's authority
over the body
is not the triumph of the possessor,
but the disappearance of the one
who called himself the owner.

Then the body
does not become no one's.

It remains Creation.

The spirit does not become impersonal—
it ceases to be claimed as a possession.

And presence is freed
from the desire to possess it.

Here freedom begins—
not to dispose of what is given,
but to receive it as given.

Chapter 4

ON FREEDOM AND SIN AS THE MEASURE OF CAPACITY

Freedom is given to the human person
and manifests itself in choice,
but is not exhausted
by choosing among many things.

In its depth,
it is the capacity
to receive Truth
without compulsion.

For God does not enter by force,
and the Absolute does not impose Himself.

Where there is compulsion,
there is no free capacity to receive;
and where there is no capacity,
presence remains hidden.

Freedom is not the owner's power
over himself and the world,
but openness to God.

And so it is not wilfulness,
but consent to be
what the human person was created to be.

Sin is not exhausted by an act,
nor can it be reduced
to the breaking of a law.

Deeper than the act,
it is a constriction of the capacity to receive.

When a person turns to himself
as the source,
he does not become self-sufficient—
he becomes enclosed.

And the possessive self
grows dense,
while the person
loses transparency.

God does not withdraw from the person;
the person ceases to be
a transparent place of presence.

And so sin
does not diminish God,
but destroys the human person
as a vessel.

This destruction
does not remain within.

It becomes word,
deed,
indifference
and violence,
through which another suffers.

Therefore guilt is real,
and the evil inflicted
cannot be called merely
a failure to measure up.

But the root of guilt lies deeper than guilt:
in self-enclosure,
from within which a person
makes himself the measure of all things.

The more a person asserts himself
as a finite centre,
the less he is able
to receive the infinite.

And then God is present,
but is not known.

He is,
but does not become manifest
in human life.

And this is not God's revenge,
but the consequence of being closed.

Freedom is not destroyed by sin,
but distorted.

It becomes the possibility
of closing oneself to God,
in place of the freedom
to be open to God.

And so the human person remains free
even in falling away,
but his freedom
is turned against his own fullness.

In Christ,
this distorted freedom
is not taken away,
but healed.

For He does not compel the human person
to become receptive,
but Himself becomes
the human capacity to receive,
open to the very end.

And sin is then disclosed
not only as guilt,
but more deeply—
as a failure to measure up
to what the human person was created to be.

And repentance
is neither a refusal of responsibility
nor self-accusation alone,
but the recovery of a space
in which change is possible.

When a person ceases
to cling to himself,
it is not the person who disappears.

What disappears is the one
who called himself the centre
and the owner.

And the person becomes one
who can receive,
respond
and give what he has received.

Then freedom
ceases to be the burden of choice
and becomes
the peace of consent.

And God does not enter suddenly,
nor does He suddenly depart.

He abides
as He has always abided.

What changes is the measure of the one
who can be
a place of His manifestation.

Chapter 5

ON THE SPIRIT
AS BREATH AND CAPACITY

The Spirit of God
does not appear as an object,
nor is He known as an essence.

He does not stand before a person
as something external,
nor is He separated from him by distance.

But the Spirit spoken of here
is not a person's inward depth,
nor the highest part of the human person.

He does not belong to the human person.

He is God,
Who gives life
and cannot be possessed.

And so the Spirit is—
not something one possesses,
but the One
by Whose breath one lives.

As breath cannot be held in the hands,
and yet without it
life ceases,
so the Spirit cannot be possessed,
yet without Him there is no life in God.

The Spirit does not add to a person's
measure from outside,
nor pour into him
as a substance into a vessel.

He opens within the person
the capacity to be a vessel.

For capacity
is not volume,
but openness.

Where a person closes himself,
the Spirit is not held captive,
yet neither does He cease to be present.

He remains,
as the air remains
around one
who holds his breath.

The Spirit does not violate freedom,
nor act through violence.

He touches,
but does not compel.

And so the Spirit is known
not by the outward force of an action,
but by the silence
in which the action
ceases to belong to the one who acts.

Where there is the noise of self-assertion,
the Spirit is not heard.

Where there is fear of emptiness,
the Spirit seems absent.

But where a person
dares to be empty,
the Spirit is discovered
as life.

For the Spirit does not add meaning,
but removes what is superfluous.

He does not multiply images,
but purifies sight.

He does not annul what has been said,
but makes audible
what was spoken
and remained unheard.

In the Church, the Spirit
does not belong to the many,
nor dissolve among them.

He breathes where
there is accord
in relinquishing possession.

And so the Church lives
neither by numbers alone
nor by power alone,
but by the Spirit,
Who belongs to no one.

The Spirit does not separate
the Father from the Son,
nor turn union
into an impersonal force.

The Father remains the Source,
the Son reveals the Father,
and the Spirit makes union
living and beyond possession.

But these words
do not define the Persons,
nor divide
the one action of God.

They merely point
to where language
can no longer hold the mystery.

And so the human path
is not a path of possessing the Spirit,
but a path of consenting
to breathe.

When a person ceases
to hold on to himself,
the Spirit does not enter—
He becomes known.

And then the capacity to receive
ceases to be an effort,
becoming one's nature.

And God neither draws near
nor moves away.
He abides as breath,
by which one lives without naming it.

Chapter 6

ON THE CHURCH
AS THE CAPACITY OF THE MANY

What is revealed in Christ
does not remain external to the human person.

The fullness revealed in Christ
needs no continuation
and is not supplemented by the many.

But it is communicated to the world
as life.

The Church is not
merely a gathering of believers,
nor is it exhausted
by institution and form.

Yet neither does it exist
without people,
ministry,
Tradition
and visible order.

For what enters the world
takes form
without becoming form's prisoner.

If the human person was created
as a place of presence,
and Christ is the fullness
of that place,
then the Church is the participation of many
in the one place
opened in Christ.

Not as the sum of persons,
but as one body,
in which difference
does not destroy unity.

For each person
receives according to his measure,
but the Church lives
not by adding measures together,
but by sharing in the gift.

In it God is not multiplied,
for the Absolute is not divided.

And Christ does not become
a part of the whole,
for the Church lives
not alongside Him,
but in Him.

The Church does not create presence,
nor does it possess it.

It keeps a space
in which presence
may be received,
recognized
and passed on.

Its visible work is necessary:
it gathers what is scattered,
hands on memory,
serves the human person
and keeps the word.

But form is true to itself
as long as it remains transparent
to that for which it was given.

When form
makes itself the goal,
the space narrows.

When the spirit
despises every form,
the many fall apart.

And so the Church lives
neither in the denial of form
nor in its deification,
but in form's faithfulness
to presence.

The Sacraments do not confine God
within a human measure.

They give bodily form
to human participation,
so that the gift may be received
not by thought alone,
but by the whole person.

The Church does not save the human person
by its own power.

It is the place
where a person ceases to be alone
in his openness to God.

And if it is faithful
to its calling,
it is not the Church that disappears,
but all within it
that sought to stand
between God and the human person
as the owner of presence.

Then multiplicity
does not destroy unity,
and unity
does not destroy difference.

And God abides
as He has always abided,
while the world finds the capacity
to receive not one,
but many,
as one body.

Chapter 7

ON PRAYER AND SILENCE AS CONSENT TO BE

Prayer does not begin with words,
nor end in wordlessness.

For words may be without prayer,
and wordlessness—without silence.

Prayer is not an address to God
as to one far away,
nor an invocation of One
Who is absent.

It is consent
to cease obscuring.

For God does not hide Himself,
but the possessive self
may obscure
His presence
within a person.

When a person
clings to words,
he marks out a distance.

When he falls silent,
he does not reach God—
he ceases to be
an obstacle to himself.

Yet a word, too,
given without a claim of possession,
does not disturb the silence.

It becomes
its breath.

Silence is not emptiness,
nor is it absence.

It is a space of presence
in which there is nothing to hold on to
and nothing to possess.

In prayer, a person
does not ascend to God,
nor bring God into himself.

He returns himself
to the presence
that has always been.

And the body does not remain
outside prayer.

It prays through breathing,
standing,
frailty,
labour
and care.

For the human spirit,
turned towards God,
becomes word
and deed
through the body.

Therefore true prayer
does not change God,
nor command the world.

It changes the one
who ceases to be the centre.

And through his word,
his hand,
his faithfulness
and care,
the world may change
without violence.

Prayer is not merely an action,
though it is enacted.

It is not exhausted by effort,
though it requires faithfulness.

It is abiding
without calculation.

Where a person
demands an answer for himself,
prayer has not yet become silence.

Where a person
can accept the absence of an answer,
he ceases to make an answer
the condition of trust.

For God answers
not only through a word,
nor only through a sign,
but through a presence
that cannot be held.

And if the silence seems empty,
perhaps
the person is still seeking
confirmation of himself.
But presence does not disappear
because
a person does not feel it.

But when it is not the person who disappears,
but the seeker
who wished to make God
an answer to himself,
silence ceases to be frightening.

It becomes
home.

And in this home
God does not appear
as an object of contemplation,
nor vanish
as something elusive.

He abides
as the One
Who never
went away.

And so prayer
is not a path to God.

It is the human person's return
from distraction
into presence.

And where there is no longer
anything to ask for oneself,
there begins
prayer without words.

This prayer
does not belong to the person,
just as breath
does not belong to the one who breathes.

It simply
unfolds.

Chapter 8

ON THE END, FULLNESS AND PEACE

The end is not merely
a completion in time,
nor is it the limit of movement.

For what is true
does not come to an end,
but ceases to be on the way.

Fullness is not attained through effort,
nor assembled piece by piece.

It is neither added to
nor diminished.

Fullness is the recognition of what
has always been given,
but has not been received to the end.

And so the end
is not a change in God,
nor the disappearance of the world.

It is the ending of distance
within a person
who ceases to live
as though distance were real.

When a person seeks the end,
he is still on the way.

When he seeks fullness
as an acquisition,
he is still counting.

But when the claiming
of the path ceases,
the end becomes peace.

Peace is not immobility,
nor is it the stopping of life.

It is life
no longer
torn between directions.

In peace, the human person
does not dissolve
or disappear.

It is not personhood that disappears,
but the owner's tension
between who he was
and who he wished to possess.

Personhood remains relation,
response
and unrepeatable presence.

And then
the bearer of God's image
does not claim the likeness,
but receives it
as a gift.

And God does not become nearer,
because nearness
ceases to be a concept.

And God does not become farther away,
because there is no longer an owner
to take the measure.

But the person remains
who responds.

In fullness,
the transcendent
does not descend,
and the immanent
does not ascend.

They are neither mingled
nor set against each other.

And so the end of the world,
in the sense spoken of here, is not destruction,
but the end of separation.

And the end of time
is not a halt,
but the end of the waiting
that claimed the future as its own.

And the Church does not disappear,
nor is the human person lost.

They cease to be instruments
of human possession
and become
what they were conceived to be.

And if a word can be spoken
about the end,
that word is—
peace.

Not the peace of release from the body,
not the peace of sleep,
nor the peace of death,
but the peace of presence
that nothing
obstructs any longer.

And in this peace
God remains the Absolute,
the human person—human,
and all things—what
they were conceived to be
before
the thought arose
of separation.

And here—the word ends.

For where
there is fullness,
the word is silence.

IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

This text was not written
to prove anything.
Nor was it composed
to teach anything.

It arose
because the word
was needed for a time,
so that afterwards
it might no longer be needed.

If a teaching was seen in it—
it does not exhaust the truth.
If faith was heard in it—
it is not exhausted by words.

And if someone has recognized here
the presence of God,
let him receive it
without seeking to possess it.
For to know God
is not to possess Him.

This treatise is—
about how a person opens himself to God.
For God is already present
within the person and throughout Creation—
before
the person begins to seek Him.

It merely recalls
that between the human person and fullness
there has never been a distance—
only absorption in oneself.

And if, after reading,
more silence remains
than thoughts,
then the word
has fulfilled its service.

And if perplexity remains—
let it too be kept,
for perplexity
is closer to truth
than self-assurance.

And now
nothing is required.
Neither continuation,
nor conclusion,
nor agreement.

Let that remain
which needs
no confirmation.

And let there be peace.
Not as an outcome,
but as recognition.

APPENDIX
ON THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

Objections to this treatise may concern not only particular words, but the very thought they express. I take them seriously. Mystical language requires care: an image is easily mistaken for a definition, and inward experience for a universal doctrine.

Below, each objection is followed by a clarification. It shows what the treatise actually affirms and where the limits of what is said lie. These clarifications leave room for further conversation.

1. Does God need the human person?

Objection

If God's presence depends on the human person, God becomes dependent on Creation. This contradicts the affirmation that He is the Absolute and has need of nothing.

Clarification

The human person does not complete God or make His presence possible. God is present in all His fullness regardless of whether a person recognizes Him.

It is the person who changes: he may close himself to presence or freely receive it and reveal it in his own life—in word, deed and his relation to another. The question, therefore, concerns human openness to God, not any lack in God Himself.

2. Can we speak of God through images?

Objection

The words ‘place’, ‘breath’, ‘capacity’ and ‘transparency’ are drawn from human experience. Do we not, through them, transfer the properties of things to God? Do we not mistake our own images for a description of God Himself?

Clarification

Images help us speak of the encounter between the human person and God. They describe human perception, not the properties of God Himself, and they do not exhaust His mystery.

‘Capacity’ here means a person's openness, and ‘transparency’ the ability to reveal presence without claiming it as a possession. If an image begins to be taken as a final definition of God, it should be let go. Nearness to God does not make Him fully comprehensible.

3. Does Christ become merely an example?

Objection

If the human person is called a place of union between the Divine and the human, does Christ not become merely one example of such a union? Does human transparency take the place of the Incarnation?

Clarification

In this treatise, Christ is the foundation and fullness of union. This union is given through the Incarnation of God; the human person does not create it by his own ascent.

When human openness and transparency are spoken of, what is meant is participation in what has been opened in Christ. A person receives the gift and responds to it with his life. His openness neither replaces the Incarnation nor supplements Christ.

4. Does God change when we recognize His presence?

Objection

When we speak of God as transcendent and immanent, and of presence hidden and manifest, do we not divide God Himself into different states or modes of being?

Clarification

‘Transcendent’ means that God is not part of the world and is not exhausted by it. ‘Immanent’ points to His presence in the world. These words help us speak of the relation between God and Creation; they do not designate two parts or states of God.

The distinction between hidden and manifest concerns human perception and life. When presence comes to be recognized and received, God acquires no new property. It is the person's openness that changes.

5. Does the body become merely a shell for the spirit?

Objection

If the spirit directs the body, is the human person not divided into an invisible owner and a material instrument belonging to him? Does the body not become a temporary shell from which one must be freed?

Clarification

In this treatise, spirit and body are understood within the unity of the human person. The human spirit is not a separate owner to whom the body belongs as a thing. It is given to the person by God. The treatise associates this spiritual depth with the image of God within the person and his capacity for living communion with God.

‘Spirit from Spirit’—this is how the thought of life received from God is expressed here. It is the language of gift and participation. God gives life while remaining indivisible.

In being born from above, the person is renewed by the action of the Holy Spirit. The life received from God unfolds within him and bears fruit. The person becomes transparent to God's presence: through his love, word and deed, God becomes visible. Yet the person remains human; his transparency does not make him Christ or replace the Incarnation.

The body has its own dignity. Through it, thought becomes word, and love becomes touch and deed. The formula ‘The spirit directs. The body embodies’ signifies responsibility for the direction of the whole of life. The primacy of the spirit does not justify contempt for the body or violence against it.

6. Does responsibility for evil disappear?

Objection

If sin is called a constriction of the capacity to receive, is it not reduced to inward closure? Do the distinction between good and evil, guilt and responsibility for harm disappear behind this image?

Clarification

‘A constriction of the capacity to receive’ here means a person's closure to God and to another. This image discloses the inward aspect of sin while preserving the distinction between good and evil.

The harm done remains real, and the person remains responsible for his act. Inward experience gives no right to diminish another's pain or to regard the consequences as already overcome.

Repentance returns the person to God and opens a space for truth and change. It includes an acknowledgement of guilt, a refusal to do evil and an endeavour to repair the harm done as far as possible. In this way, openness to God becomes visible in a changed life and a changed relation to another.

7. Does the Trinity become a scheme?

Objection

When it is said that the Father is the Source, the Son reveals the Father, and the Spirit makes union living, are the Persons of the Trinity not reduced to three functions? Does their personal distinction disappear behind these words?

Clarification

These words help us speak of Divine presence and union. They are not definitions of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, nor do they exhaust the mystery of the Trinity.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not presented here as three roles of an impersonal principle. Their personal distinction is preserved, and the one action of God is not divided into three independent actions.

In calling the Holy Spirit living presence, the treatise does not reduce Him to an impersonal force or to an inward state of the human person.

If these words begin to be understood as an exhaustive explanation of the Trinity, the limit of language must be acknowledged. An image can point to the mystery, but cannot contain it wholly.

8. Does the treatise deny the visible Church?

Objection

If the Church is called a space of transparency, and form a possible barrier, do community, Tradition, the Sacraments and church ministry become unnecessary? Is personal mystical experience being placed above the life of the Church?

Clarification

The treatise preserves the significance of the visible Church. Community, Tradition, the Sacraments and everyday ministry are necessary to human participation in its life. Within it, a person prays with others, receives and passes on the word, and learns love and care.

Transparency here means openness to God through which God becomes visible in people's lives. They remain human: their openness does not make them Christ or replace the Incarnation.

The criticism concerns the attempt to possess God's presence—to present it as one's property, make it dependent on human authority, or exhaust it within an established form. Church form remains true to its purpose when it helps a person receive the gift and live by it.

Personal spiritual experience likewise gives no right to possess the truth or to regard one's own experience as the measure of God. Openness to God preserves room for another, for common prayer, Tradition and service.

9. Does the silence of prayer lead to inaction?

Objection

If prayer is understood as silence and the relinquishing of possession, and the world does not change at our command, does this not lead to inaction before suffering, violence and injustice? Does inward peace become a way of refusing to hear another's pain?

Clarification

In the treatise, silence means openness to God in which a person ceases to make his own will the measure of what happens. This openness preserves attentiveness to another—to his pain, need and dignity.

Prayer may be a word, a plea, a cry or wordlessness. The affirmation that it does not command the world does not forbid asking for help, healing or protection. A plea preserves trust in God without becoming a demand to subject Him to a human design.

Prayerful silence helps a person act without seeking to assert himself at another's expense. It may continue in care, protection, faithfulness and labour. Trust in God does not release a person from responsibility for what he is able to do.

Silence is not above love when love requires a word, a hand, protection or work.

10. Does personhood disappear in union with God?

Objection

If the ‘owner’ and the ‘centre’ disappear, who remains? Does union with God mean the dissolution of personhood? And is mystical experience being presented as proof of life after death?

Clarification

The ‘owner’ here names a person's claim to be his own source and the centre of all things. It is expressed in the desire to subject other people to himself and to possess God's very presence. The disappearance of this claim does not mean the annihilation of personhood.

A person retains his uniqueness, his capacity to love, to respond to God and to be with another. Union does not erase his face. He remains a human person who receives life as a gift.

The mystical experience spoken of in the treatise is not offered as scientific proof of consciousness outside the body or of life after death. The text neither explains the structure of consciousness nor describes existence after death.

Death is not declared an illusion, nor the body a needless shell. The hope of resurrection expresses trust in God, to Whom the whole person is entrusted.

In closing

When the human person is called a ‘place’ of Divine presence, the reference is to his capacity to receive that presence and reveal it through his life. God is not limited by the human person: He is present both within him and throughout Creation.

The words of this treatise point towards the possibility of such a life. They do not define God or exhaust His mystery.

Beyond this boundary begins a silence that does not refute what has been said, but keeps it.

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