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## **Opening to God and When the Well Runs Dry**

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gained a foothold. By 1925, the church had adapted to the new order of things, and the first national congress of Catholic Action was proof of this. There was a "new realization of the responsibility of the laity in the church, and the necessity of real Catholicism showing itself in social action for the poor and the oppressed of society," notes Schumacher.

The book ends with the role played by the religious during the Japanese occupation. In reply to the query of Cardinal Montini, papal secretary of state who would later occupy the Vatican throne, Apostolic Delegate Piani cabled that eighty-five prelates had been killed during the war and about thirty-eight slain by snipers or died in fires started by Japanese soldiers. Schumacher concludes, "it would be many years after the war before so many priests, brothers and sisters would be replaced."

As a source book, *Readings in Philippine Church History* is invaluable.

Carlos Quirino

✓ *OPENING TO GOD*. By Thomas H. Green, S.J. Manila: St. Paul Publications, 1977. 110 pages.

*WHEN THE WELL RUNS DRY*. By Thomas H. Green, S.J. Manila: St. Paul Publications, 1979. 125 pages.

*Opening to God*, as the subtitle suggests, is a guide to prayer, explaining prayer to beginners. It has two main parts: the first is the *what* and the *why* of prayer, and the second is the *how* of it. The title of the book comes from the author's definition of prayer as an "opening of the mind and heart to God." This is a good definition. Understood as "opening," prayer is seen as receptiveness and sensitivity rather than talking. The emphasis is healthy because while it avoids the quietism condemned by the Church, it does not see the pray-er as running the enterprise himself but as depending on God. All he can do is open himself, and leave the rest up to God. The second and third elements of the definition, that it is an opening of "the mind and heart," emphasize that prayer is an activity of the whole man, not just the intellect or the emotions but both. It is not intellectualism and it is not emotionalism. There is a cognitive aspect to prayer, and there is the feeling aspect. The fourth element, that it is an opening "to God," emphasizes that God is not a creature among other creatures, but one who is other and beyond. On this rests the whole thesis of the book that precisely because the other pole of prayer is totally other, we cannot control God but must wait for Him, and for His gift. He runs the business and we have to open ourselves. The rest is up to Him.

Fr. Green has an especially interesting chapter entitled "The Irrelevance of Prayer." It is an intriguing title. The point that he makes is that if one means by relevant, how "useful" prayer is, then prayer is supremely irrelevant.

Prayer as a means of accomplishing our ends is of very limited relevance. God, being God, cannot be manipulated to our ends. Thus, there is an important sense in which prayer is and must be irrelevant – in much the same way that love is and must be irrelevant. “Fall in love, get married, or have a friend, because it will make you a more useful member of society” sounds strange to one who has known and experienced love and friendship.

In the “how” of prayer, Fr. Green asks whether there is a technique of prayer. Prayer as he defines it puts a heavy emphasis on listening. He says that there are two senses in which we can speak legitimately of techniques of prayer. First, we can speak of techniques for coming to quiet, for bringing ourselves to that stillness in which the voice of God can be heard. Secondly, we can speak of techniques of positively disposing ourselves to encounter the Lord. St. John of the Cross called this the active purification of the soul. These are ascetical practices such as fasting and physical mortifications. Both of these senses represent ways in which we can and must cooperate with grace in opening ourselves to the advent of the Lord in our lives.

The book concludes with an epilogue which is entitled: “Prayer Beyond the Beginnings.” In a way this is the transition to the sequel, *When the Well Runs Dry*, published two years after *Opening to God*.

The passivity and the dryness into which the Lord eventually leads us in prayer is often contrary to our expectations. To guide us through this experience and help us make some sense of this reality of the interior life, Fr. Green develops three dominant images. Hopefully, the author says, this will help us clarify our experiences in prayer.

Teresa of Avila’s analogy of the four ways of drawing water provides the framework of the discussion on the stages of the life of prayer (chapters one and two). The water is the consolation and the feeling of joy experienced in prayer. The water is to nourish the flowers of virtue. At each succeeding stage of the interior life, as in the four ways of drawing water, God does more and more of the work, and we do less and less (in the case of the rain, we need not do anything at all). As we progress in the interior life, more and more our prayer becomes not what we do but what the Lord does to us and in us. Genuine prayer is clearly manifested by what the Lord has effected in our lives rather than the joy we have felt in prayer. Prayer and the consolations derived from it are not ends in themselves, just as one does not draw water for the sheer joy of drawing water. Progressively, to pray is to become the clay in the hands of the Potter.

This brings us to the second image which is Jeremiah 18:6 – the clay and the potter. One of the upside down features of the world of the interior life is that as we progress in our spiritual journey, we experience more aridity than consolation. Sooner or later as the title of the second volume suggests, we shall find the well of consolations running dry. Unlike previous experiences of dryness in prayer which were due to negligence and selfishness on our part,

dryness at this stage in our spiritual pilgrimage takes on a new meaning. This the author discusses in chapters three, four, and five. The dryness, the darkness, and the aridity are not due to distance or absence but precisely due to closeness and intimacy. One who is accustomed to the dark is blinded when suddenly exposed to the brilliance of the Lord. The darkness is due to the presence of the overpowering light rather than to its absence. Dryness then is healing, for it is in and through this dryness and darkness which means intimacy, that the Lord accomplishes the major part of the work of transforming us. When we have accepted this dryness in faith and surrender to the Lord, we have allowed him to transform us. We have surrendered ourselves as clay to be shaped in the hands of the potter.

But what about the goal of the interior life? Where is it all leading to? The author suggests that perhaps this is not the question that should preoccupy us. To illustrate the point, the image of floating is introduced (chapter six and the epilogue). God is the sea, and the major decision that each one has to make for himself is whether he should chart his own course, or whether he should allow the tide to bring him where it wills. If one decides to chart his own course, then he must swim. If he opts for the latter possibility, then he must float, and let the tide bring him where it wills. The floater yields and surrenders to the flow of the water. He is going some place but that is the concern of God. The major decision is to trust the tide. In this sense, the floater is poor in spirit. In a supreme act of freedom he yields his self-determination to the God of love that He may bring him where He wills.

Thus, prayer is like the four ways of drawing water, for at each succeeding stage of the interior life, we do less and less, and God more and more. To pray is to be the clay in the Potter's hands. We must allow the Lord to be Lord. We must let him form us as he wills. Prayer is also floating, for we should let God lead us and bring us where he wishes. As we progress in our interior journey, we discover that we do not experience the joy and the consolation we used to. The well has become dry as it was bound to be. What then? The author explains this and suggests to the pray-er that it is in the moments of dryness and darkness that he should hang on with greater determination, for it is then that the Lord accomplishes the work of transformation.

*Adolfo N. Dacanay, S.J.*

SI JESUS NA TAGA-NAZARETH. By Pedro C. Sevilla, S.J. Lungsod ng Quezon: Dalubhasaang Panteyolohiya ng Loyola, Pamantasang Ateneo de Manila, 1979. 180 pages.

Time and again the cry has been raised in the Philippines and in other so-called Third World countries to develop a more "contextualized" ("indi-