

ADULT GEOMETRY OF THE MIND

The Welsh poet R.S. Thomas, who died in 2000, wrote over 1000 poems in his lifetime, some of which have entered the canon of great literature. He was ordained as a priest in the Church in Wales and worked for 40 years in rural parishes.

Much of his works exposes him as a man who experienced isolation as a daily reality. Arguably, he was in many ways unsuited to his role as a parish priest in wild Wales. He felt isolated from his people because they spoke Welsh and he had to undertake the task of learning the language in order to communicate intimately with them. He felt anger with their failure to appreciate their own culture and their acceptance of what he felt was a servile place for Welshness. He also felt isolated by the lack of ambition in the lives of so many of the people to whom he ministered. He also felt isolated in his churches because very often, despite the ringing of church bells, he was the only worshipper present. In his forty year ministry, he increasingly felt isolated from God, whose absence or presence became the theme of several of his poems.

In his poem **Emerging**, he writes directly of this experience and in particular, reflects on what is happening to his daily work of praying to God.

Emerging

Not as in the old days I pray,
God. My life is not what it was.
Yours, too, accepts the presence of
the machine? Once I would have asked
healing. I go now to be doctored,
to drink sinlessly of the blood
of my brother, to lend my flesh
as manuscript of the great poem
of the scalpel. I would have knelt
long, wrestling with you, wearing
you down. Hear my prayer, Lord, hear
my prayer. As though you were deaf, myriads
of mortals have kept up their shrill
cry, explaining your silence by
their unfitness.

It begins to appear
this is not what prayer is about.
It is the annihilation of difference,
the consciousness of myself in you,
of you in me; the emerging
of the adolescence of nature
into the adult geometry
of the mind. I begin to recognise
you anew, God of form and number.
There are questions we are the solution
to, others whose echoes we must expand
to contain. Circular as our way
is, it leads not back to that snake-haunted
garden, but onward to the tall city
of glass that is the laboratory of the spirit.



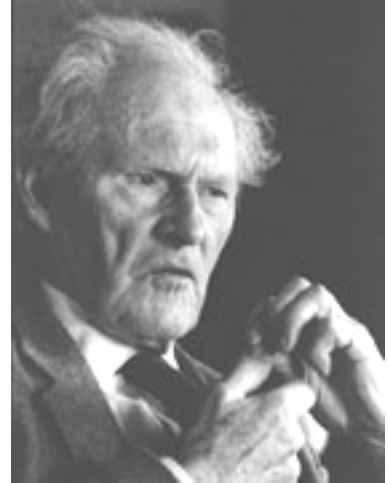
This poem presents a stunning revelation of the reality of what prayer is. The poet reveals that for him, the concept of prayer has changed dramatically. The old emphasis on pleading for such things as health is no longer applicable. For health we go to see doctors, rather than pester God with our persistent petitions. With a remembrance of centuries of unanswered prayers, considered by the individuals as evidence of their unfitness of an answer, he begins to appreciate that “this is not what prayer is about.”

So what is it all about?

He describes the answer as “the annihilation of difference” and “the consciousness of myself in you, of you in me”

This is a deep insight, as the human and godly unite in prayer as they did in the person of Jesus Christ. We become Christ-like in the deepest sense and he becomes part of us internalised and personal.

He goes on to say that this is part of a growing up of the Christian, the praying Christian.

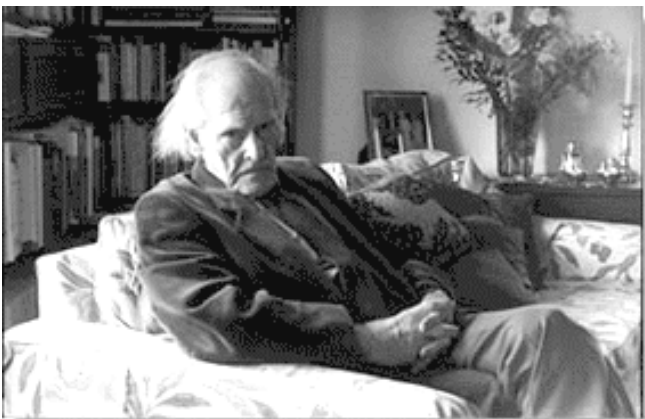


“the emerging
of the adolescence of nature
into the adult geometry
of the mind”

With this intellectual apparatus newly charged, he starts to recognise God again. Now he is turning from an adolescence of praying into a more mature spiritual approach. He discovers that praying is not about pleading with God for this and that, or leaving the problems at the feet of God and walking away unburdened. It is now a dynamic which involves humanity in direct action, conscious decisions and a commitment to search for answers.

“There are questions we are the solution
to, others whose echoes we must expand
to contain.”

I like this thinking. It feels that way to me too. I have never liked the shopping list of intercessory prayer or the demeaning helplessness of the encounter with God in prayer. We remember the prayer of St. Richard of Chichester. Jesus is our most merciful redeemer, but we are invited to see him also as our friend and brother.



The poem ends optimistically. As we know all too well, human efforts can often lead to disasters, which is one of the reasons why we pray for help, but for Thomas, our movement, although circular, does not send us back to the “snake haunted garden” but rather to the city of God, now seen as a modern city which is transparent, and where our experiments may be seen and tried under God without fear.

NEIL RICHARDSON