

31. *Reacting to God*

In psychology as well as biology, there is an in-depth study of *reactions*, defined as the responses of a living being to stimuli. I wonder why, in the area of spirituality, so little attention is paid to this notion. And yet, in one sense, we must say that the spiritual life—and prayer in particular—is man's reaction to God.

All the fundamental religious attitudes of the human person at prayer (adoration, self-offering, praise, fear, thanksgiving and consecration) are understandable only from this point of view.

Let us suppose the thought of God's transcendence comes to your mind, either suddenly as the effect of a grace, or perhaps at the end of a laborious meditation. Are you not irresistibly impelled to prostrate yourself like a Bedouin at the hour of prayer? To prostrate not only your body, but your mind, your heart and your whole life?

When you discover that everything comes from God, do you not experience the need to give your whole being back to God, in a surge of self-offering and submission?

When you see a reflection from God's splendor in creatures, does not admiration rise from your heart to your lips in a hymn of praise? Many of the Psalms were born of this contemplation!

When God allows you to glimpse his holiness, do you not experience feeling of awe, a reverential fear, a quivering of your whole being, a keen awareness not only of your own smallness but also of your sinfulness? Isaiah, suddenly confronting the holiness of the Lord, cried out, "*Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips*" (Is 6:5).

When you remember the many graces you have received during your life, does not thanksgiving (that turning of the grateful creature toward the Creator, that joyous leap of the child toward his Father) completely elate you?

And if, one day, the infinite love with which you are loved reveals itself, do you not feel the need to consecrate yourself to God by offering him your whole being?

Now do you understand what I meant when I told you that prayer is the soul's reaction to God? Obviously, all these interior attitudes are not necessarily explicit in each and every hour of mental prayer. One or another of them predominates. But the religious roots of our prayer consist of these great sentiments that persevering mental prayer accumulates little by little.

It would be just as absurd to claim that we can draw these wellsprings of prayer from within ourselves, without first meditating on the perfections of God, as for a mirror to claim that it makes light emanate from itself.

Some day God may take the initiative in letting you glimpse one or another of his perfections. But in the meantime, you must set out to discover them gropingly and continue to meditate without getting discouraged, sustained by a joyful hope.