

THE PRAYER PROBLEM (DR. SCOTT DAVISON)

Our prayers cannot “make a difference” or change events because:

1. Uniqueness (theological problem)
 - a. Divine Goodness
 - b. Divine Freedom
2. “Reasons-Skeptical” (epistemological problem)

Worry: Deemphasizing personal prayer due to these problems pushes one away from the personal God towards Stoicism or Buddhism, or generally towards ceremony.

MY ANSWER

Let us take Davison’s conclusion as valid: prayer does not change future events. Even so, there is good reason for the Christian to make petitionary prayers. According to the Augustinian account of petitionary prayer, its primary value consists not in convincing God to do something but rather in deifying the petitioner through the transformation and discipline of his desires.

AUGUSTINE’S “D” MODEL OF PRAYER

“The continuance of your longing is the continuance of your prayer.” *Augustine, Expositions, 197*

2 Problems with Desires:

1. Wrong orientation or “disordered”
2. Lack of knowledge

Due to these flaws, we are unable to receive the goodness God bestows. Therefore, we do not need prayer in order to change God but instead in order to change ourselves.

Vending Machine vs. Cave



AUGUSTINE’S THEOLOGY OF DEIFICATION

“the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as is possible.” *Dionysius the Areopagite, 6th century A.D.*

“The rest that **are made** gods, are **made by His own Grace**, are **not born** of His Substance, that they should be the same as He, but that by favour they should **come to Him**.” *Augustine, Expositions, 315*

The language used to describe the divinity of Christ is static, eternal. In contrast, the language used to describe the divinity of Christians is dynamic, vectorized. Deification is not an imitation, but **a turn**. (*Meconi, 21*)

God (being, eternity, perfection)



Absence of God (non-being, ephemerality, incompleteness)

Sin is the corruption of deification, still desiring to become a god but turning away from God to satisfy the desire.

PRAYER + DEIFICATION

“there is brought about **in prayer** a **turning** of the heart to Him, who is ever ready to give, if we will but take what He has given.” *Augustine, Sermon on the Mount, 75.*

God does not change events in order to satisfy the current desires of the petitioner, for he loves the petitioner far too much to allow the petitioner to remain in his undeveloped and imperfect desires. Rather, God transforms the desire of the petitioner, thereby changing his trajectory from earth-bound to heaven-bound.

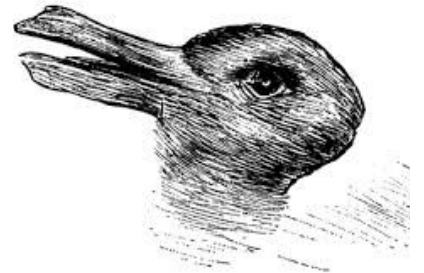
Just as deification is corrupted when man attempts to seize godhood without God, so prayer is corrupted when man asserts the categorical goodness of his own desires. “It is good because I desire it,” is the wrong sort of prayer. “I desire it because it is good” is the right sort of prayer. When the human takes the position of determining what is good, orthodox prayer devolves into what Santayana calls a “childish and sacrilegious belief in magic.” (remember the vending machine)

ANSWERING THE “REASONS-SKEPTICAL” OBJECTION

“**In the very act of turning** there is effected a **purging of the inner eye**, inasmuch as those things of a temporal kind which were desired are excluded, so that the vision of **the pure heart** may be able to bear the pure light.” *Augustine, Commentary, 75.*

What does this mean? Some clarifying illustrations:

1. Plato’s Allegory of the Cave: eyes adjusting to the light
2. Miracles: Feeding of the 5,000 through multiplying 5 loaves vs. feeding the whole earth through the multiplying of a few grains planted in the earth.
3. Duck-Rabbit / Good-Evil: The truth of the evil of our circumstances is just as “real” as the truth of God’s love. **What Augustine’s model of prayer implies is not that we, as petitioners, cause God to be good. Instead, when we pray, we see God’s goodness.**



FURTHER READING

Augustine. “Letter to Proba, 130.” Translated by J.G. Cunningham. *From Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 1.* Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.) Revised and edited for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102130.htm>

Davison, Scott A. “Petitionary Prayer.” *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, Edited by Michael Rea and Thomas Flint, 2009. *Oxford Handbooks Online*, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199596539.013.0014.

Meconi, David. *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013.