

Union Congregational Church  
Adult Sunday School/Abram K-J  
October 6, 2013  
Evelyn Underhill

Pray.

Review of what we're doing in the class for six weeks. Have had Augustine and Fénelon so far.

*SLIDE:*

Devotional Classic is "a kind of writing that has stood the test of time and that seeks to form the soul before God."

*SLIDE:*

9/22: St. Augustine (pp. 55-61)

9/29: François Fénelon (pp. 48-54)

**10/6: Evelyn Underhill (pp. 94-100)**

10/13: Apocryphal Literature

10/20: Catherine of Siena (pp. 264-270)

10/27: Kathleen Norris (pp. 363-368)

[OFFER HANDOUT]

*SLIDE:*

**Evelyn Underhill  
(1875-1941)**

*SLIDE:*

**Brief bio**

- Anglican with Catholic leanings
- Sought to reconcile mysticism with orthodoxy
- Conversion at 32

*SLIDE:*

**Brief bio**

- Spiritual director, retreat leader, speaker
- Wrote some 30 books (some under male pseudonym)

Let's look at the reading together.

*SLIDE (Section 1, read section):*

"In the first place, what do we mean by prayer? Surely just this: that part of our conscious life which is deliberately oriented towards, and exclusively responds to, spiritual reality. God is that spiritual reality, and we believe God to be immanent in all things...."

Her definition of prayer. What do we think about this? Anything we'd add?

Paragraph 2—is “ascent” a good word? (“A going up or out” in paragraph 3) Good way of thinking about prayer?

*SLIDE (Section 2, read):*

"The whole of a person's life consists in a series of balanced responses to this Transcendent-Immanent Reality. Because we live under two orders, we are at once a citizen of Eternity and of Time...[moving] between this world and that."

Transcendent (God is Wholly Other, God is Far) vs. Immanent (God is Incarnate, God is Near) in theology.

*SLIDE (Section 3, read):*

"First, there are three capacities or faculties which we have under consideration--the thinking faculty, the feeling faculty, and the willing or acting faculty. These practically cover all the ways in which the self can react to other selves and other things. From the combination of these three come all the possibilities of self-expression which are open to us."

"...our mental, emotional, and volitional life."

Note (only if we make it to section 4): “that communion with Reality for which we were made” (last two lines on p. 95) echoes Augustine.

If time...

- top p. 96 (section 4): “...many kinds of intercourse with Reality—adoration, petition, mediation, contemplation—”... what else?

*SLIDE (Section 5, read):*

"First we think, then we feel, then we will. This little generalization must not be pressed too hard; but it is broadly true, and gives us a starting-point to trace out the way in which the three main powers of the self act in prayer. It is important to know how they act or should act."

Often we wait till we feel to think. But in Anglican tradition it is not uncommon to talk about *praying shaping believing*. (Whereas this seems to imply believing shaping praying.) That’s another angle, from Underhill’s own tradition. Sometimes we must simply will first, then trust that the feelings follow as we do. Does Underhill perhaps overprioritize the mind a bit?

If time...

- p. 97, top paragraph of section 7: But this is hard! That’s why praying other people’s prayers can be good, since we are not always successful at “preparing the consciousness for the inflow of new life.”
- p. 97, section 8: “Desire and intention are the most dynamic of our faculties; they do work. They are the true explorers of the Infinite, the instrument of our ascents to God.”

Agree?

*SLIDE (Section 9, read):*

"If the worth of our prayer life depended upon the maintenance of a constant high level of feeling or understanding, we would be in a dangerous place. Though these often seem to fail us, the reigning will remains. Even when our heart is cold and our mind is dim, prayer is still possible to us."

This is the payoff in her three-pronged description of the self.

**Did anything else in the reading stand out to you as compelling, convicting, confusing?**

*SLIDE:*

***Questions from Devotional Classics***

1. What are the three faculties that Evelyn Underhill encourages us to use in our times of prayer? Give concrete examples of how these three faculties work in our daily life (see sections 3 and 5).

*SLIDE:*

***Questions from Devotional Classics***

2. The mind, according to Underhill, should not be left out of the act of prayer, because it is the faculty that prepares the way for prayer. How has your intellect helped or hindered your prayer life?

If time...

- Ask question #5
- Talk about Suggested Exercises #1 and #3 (did anyone try anything here? how did you find it?)

*SLIDE:*

***Richard Foster on Underhill***

*"...Underhill stresses our active participation in God's work. ... How often we lack the will to persevere just when we were on the verge of slipping into the Holy of Holies! How much better to harness all our mental, volitional, and emotional powers for the service of Christ."*

*SLIDE:*

*For Next Week...*

*Sunday, October 13, 2013*

*Apocryphal Literature*

*Readings forthcoming via email (Monday)*

**Close in prayer—sharing how to pray, as time.**