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THE THEOLOGY OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER: WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CONTEMPORARY  
PROTESTANT THEOLOGY

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PROTESTANT THEOLOGY

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A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty  
of the  
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Doctor of Theology

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by  
Thomas Furman Hewitt  
July 1968

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APPROVAL SHEET

THE THEOLOGY OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER: WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CONTEMPORARY  
PROTESTANT THEOLOGY

Thomas Furman Hewitt

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TO DONNA

## PREFACE

It is difficult to acknowledge individually all of those whose instruction, support and thoughtfulness make up the total experience of graduate study. Suffice it to say that one does not complete a thesis, or the study which precedes it, without the help of one's family and the academic community. I am keenly aware of my indebtedness to a host of men and women who have, at the point where our lives have crossed, made me what I am.

Interest in the subject of this thesis has been academic as well as personal. Primary stimulus for research in this area came with reading done in a seminar on "Science and Religion" under Dr. Eric Rust--his influence on my thinking at several points is gratefully acknowledged--and a paper on "Prayer in the Protestant Reformation" done for Dr. James Leo Garrett. In the last analysis, however, it was the influence and interest of Dr. Garrett, this writer's supervisor, that was the deciding factor in choosing intercessory prayer as the subject of this thesis. For his professional guidance and, even more, his personal friendship, I am greatly appreciative.

Doctors Dale Moody and Wayne Ward, the other members of my graduate committee, have also contributed to my thinking concerning this thesis. To all of my professors,

those who have done so much to mold my thinking, I can only express my thanks and the hope that their efforts have not been in vain.

Others have contributed to this thesis and my graduate work: I am indebted to Mrs. Raymond Farmer and Miss Jean Aiken for typing the manuscripts under rather trying circumstances, and to Dr. Ronald Deering and the staff of the library for their cooperation. To Mr. and Mrs. Wyatt Shely, the deacons, and the members of Friendship Baptist Church, Anderson County, Kentucky, I will always be under obligation for their patience with a young pastor whose time and interest were divided between school and church. It goes without saying that I am indebted to my peers, those graduate students whose personal friendship, constant encouragement and academic excellence have done so much to enrich my life.

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Finally, but most important, I would like to express my most keenly felt obligation--that is, to my family. My parents have never failed to support me, by both prayer and example, through long years of academic training. Appreciation for years of such devotion cannot be adequately

expressed. My wife's parents, too, have been constant with their offers of encouragement and support. My son, Tom, is still too young to realize what joy he gave to a father who was away from him all too much.

It is, however, my wife Donna who deserves the greatest accolades. She has been breadwinner, housewife, pastor's wife, typist and mother while she patiently awaited the day her husband would not "live" at the library! Words alone cannot express what her care, wisdom, joy and love have meant to me during the past three years. It is little enough a gesture for such a wondrous gift, but this thesis is dedicated to her with love.

T. Furman Hewitt

Louisville, Kentucky

July 5, 1968

## ABBREVIATIONS

<u>ERE</u>	<u>Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics</u>
<u>ESB</u>	<u>Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists</u>
<u>IB</u>	<u>The Interpreter's Bible</u>
<u>IDB</u>	<u>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</u>
<u>JE</u>	<u>The Jewish Encyclopedia</u>
<u>TDNT</u>	<u>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</u>
<u>UJE</u>	<u>The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia</u>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	v
ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .	viii
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	xiv

PART ONE

INTERCESSORY PRAYER AND THE TEACHINGS  
OF THE SCRIPTURE

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	2
------------------------	---

Chapter

I. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND IN LATER JUDAISM . . . . .	3
Intercessory Prayer according to the Traditions . . . . .	5
The JE tradition . . . . .	8
The Elijah and Elisha narratives . . . . .	13
Monarchic sources . . . . .	13
Eighth- and seventh-century prophetic traditions . . . . .	15
The Deuteronomic tradition . . . . .	19
The post-exilic period . . . . .	19
Intercessory Prayer in the Intertestamental Period . . . . .	21
Presuppositions of Intercessory Prayer . . . . .	27
The objective efficacy of words . . . . .	27
Israel as a covenant people . . . . .	28
God as Creator and Sustainer of the world . . . . .	32

	PAGE
God as sovereign will . . . . .	35
God as personal . . . . .	36
II. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT . . . . .	40
Intercessory Prayer in the Synoptic Tradition . . . . .	41
Jesus as a man of prayer . . . . .	41
Five prayers attributed to Jesus . . . . .	43
References to intercessory prayers by Jesus . . . . .	47
Petition and intercession by persons other than Jesus . . . . .	49
Synoptic teaching about prayer . . . . .	50
Intercessory Prayer in the Johannine Writings . . . . .	61
Intercessory Prayer in Acts . . . . .	65
Intercessory Prayer in the Pauline Letters . . . . .	67
Intercession in the Deutero-Pauline Epistles, the Catholic Epistles and the Apocalypse . . . . .	74
Ephesians . . . . .	74
Pastoral Epistles . . . . .	75
I Peter . . . . .	76
James . . . . .	77
Hebrews . . . . .	80
The Apocalypse . . . . .	82
Jude . . . . .	83
Conclusions . . . . .	83
Two Problems . . . . .	83

Presuppositions of intercessory prayer . . . . .	88
CONCLUSION TO PART ONE . . . . .	94

## PART TWO

## CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	99
Chapter	
III. PRAYER AFFECTS GOD'S ACTIONS . . . . .	101
H. H. Farmer . . . . .	103
Presuppositions . . . . .	104
The meaning of prayer . . . . .	112
Critique . . . . .	115
George A. Buttrick . . . . .	117
Presuppositions . . . . .	118
Petitionary and intercessory prayer . . . . .	124
Critique . . . . .	131
IV. PRAYER ALIGNS THE ONE PRAYING WITH THE WILL OF GOD . . . . .	135
John R. Rice . . . . .	136
Presuppositions . . . . .	137
The significance of petition and intercession . . . . .	138
Critique . . . . .	141
Karl Barth . . . . .	144
Prayer as a Christian privilege . . . . .	145
The object of prayer . . . . .	155

	Critique . . . . .	158
V.	PRAYER IS EFFECTIVE PRIMARILY IN AND THROUGH THE ONE PRAYING . . . . .	164
	Georgia Harkness . . . . .	166
	Presuppositions . . . . .	166
	Petition and intercession . . . . .	167
	Critique . . . . .	171
	Harry Emerson Fosdick . . . . .	175
	Prayer as communion with God . . . . .	176
	Prayer and natural law . . . . .	179
	Intercessory prayer . . . . .	181
	Critique . . . . .	187
	John Burnaby . . . . .	188
	Intercessory prayer and its presuppositions . . . . .	189
	Critique . . . . .	193
VI.	PRAYER IS REDEFINED IN TERMS OF ETHICAL ACTION . . . . .	195
	John A. T. Robinson and Douglas Rhymes . . . . .	196
	John A. T. Robinson . . . . .	196
	Douglas Rhymes . . . . .	201
	Critique . . . . .	208
	Paul van Buren . . . . .	211
	Presuppositions . . . . .	212
	The "logic" of prayer . . . . .	213
	Critique . . . . .	218

CONCLUSION TO PART TWO . . . . .	218
Can God Act? . . . . .	218
Does God Act? . . . . .	220
Strength and Weaknesses . . . . .	221

## PART THREE

## A CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT

## Chapter

VII. A CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT . . . . .	227
The Choices . . . . .	228
Major Objections Considered . . . . .	233
Providence and natural law . . . . .	234
The freedom of man . . . . .	239
The nature of God . . . . .	241
Towards a Theology of Intercessory Prayer . . . . .	252
The doctrine of God . . . . .	252
The doctrine of Man . . . . .	253
The doctrine of Creation . . . . .	253
The doctrine of the Church . . . . .	254
The doctrine of Redemption . . . . .	254
Concluding Statement . . . . .	255
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	257

## INTRODUCTION

### Importance of Subject

As these words are written, the United States is still recovering from the tragic death of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, candidate for President of the United States, who was cut down by an assassin's bullet June 5, and died June 6, 1968. While his life hung in the balance, religious and political leaders issued statements which exhorted all men to pray for his recovery. Millions did!

Men have instinctively felt the need, in time of tragedy, to express their concern, their hopes, their agony and anger, their desires, and their faith to a God who stands beyond man but who is conceived to be sympathetic to man. "Prayer is the very soul of religion. It brings to God the miseries of man, and brings back to man the communion and the help of God."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, writers of all persuasion are agreed that prayer and religion may not be separated, for prayer is "the very hearthstone of all piety."<sup>2</sup> The great leaders of the Christian Church may

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<sup>1</sup>Auguste Sabatier, Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Heiler, Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion, p. xiii.

disagree on many points, but, says D. S. Cairns, they are unanimous at the point of the power of prayer.<sup>3</sup>

Belief in the power and efficacy of prayer has not, however, gone unchallenged. By the nineteenth century, Newtonian physics and Cartesian philosophy combined to challenge man's belief in a personal God who was both willing and able to help in time of need.<sup>4</sup> The sermons of men such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and F. W. Robertson proclaimed the popular belief that reality was conditioned by natural law; the world, they said, could not be changed simply because one preferred it differently.<sup>5</sup> Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that a genuine belief in the value of petitionary prayer is now lacking in many people who still profess to pray. As Leo Tolstoy said in My Confession: "A man often believes for years that his faith is still intact, while at the same time not a trace of it remains in him."<sup>6</sup> This writer has, himself, often

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<sup>3</sup>D. S. Cairns, The Faith that Rebels, p. 184.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. John Dillenberger, Protestant Thought and Natural Science, A Historical Interpretation; Eric C. Rust, Science and Faith: Towards a Theological Understanding of Nature, pp. 3-37.

<sup>5</sup>W. Herrmann, "Prayer," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, IX, 156.

<sup>6</sup>Cited in John Sutherland Bonnell, The Practice and Power of Prayer, p. 41.

felt bound to the form of prayer but inwardly doubted its effective role in contemporary society.

If, then, there is a general decline in mankind's regard for and practice of prayer, one of the major problems lies in scientifically oriented man's doubts about petitionary prayers. Those who believe in a personal God readily accept the validity of prayers of confession and adoration; the problem is, as John Burnaby points out in Soundings, that prayers of intercession and petition are no longer self-justifying to modern man.<sup>7</sup> Petitionary prayers are a puzzle, though many would assert that they do indeed have a value, but what of intercession, that is, petitionary prayer to which has been affixed the additional factor of a third party? Are prayers for other men effective? If so, how are they to be explained? Personal communion on a one-to-one basis may seem justifiable, but the problems involved when a third party is brought into the relationship seem to confuse an already complex issue. As James Hastings puts it: "In all prayer there is mystery. But the mystery centres in intercessory prayer."<sup>8</sup>

The problem is both personal and theoretical. On

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<sup>7</sup>John Burnaby, "Christian Prayer," Soundings: Essays Concerning Christian Understanding, A. R. Vidler, editor, pp. 219-37.

<sup>8</sup>James Hastings, The Christian Doctrine of Prayer, p. 109.

the personal side, many heartfelt and seemingly worthy prayers of intercession are unanswered, whereas others are answered! Why? On the theoretical side, the question of intercessory prayer raises not only the question of scientific "determinism," but also the doctrines of both God and man. If God is love, why must man pray for his brother? If man is free, does not intercessory prayer violate that freedom?

These and other questions are very real to the modern, intelligent Christian. The positive response which this thesis subject has evoked in both family and fellow students is ample proof to this writer that the desire for a meaningful prayer-life is hampered by unspoken doubts. It is simply not enough to say, as does Robert Browning, "I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists."<sup>9</sup> It is more accurate to say:

Our doubts are traitors,  
And make us lose the good we oft might win  
By fearing to attempt.<sup>10</sup>

It is this question on the part of man--what meaning can intercessory prayer have for my life?--that is the justification for this thesis subject.

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<sup>9</sup>Robert Browning, "Bishop Blougram's Apology."

<sup>10</sup>William Shakespeare, "Measure for Measure," Act I, Scene 4.

### Purpose of Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is threefold: (1) to isolate the presuppositions which undergirded biblical belief in intercessory prayer; (2) to survey and assess critically contemporary Protestant interpretations of petitionary and intercessory prayer; (3) to state, in dialogue with the biblical heritage and contemporary thought, what this writer holds to be a viable understanding of the relationship of God and man and of God and his world in the act of intercessory prayer.

### Delimitation of the Subject

The purpose of this thesis is not to examine the subject of "prayer" in its entire scope. The concern here is with the problem of intercessory prayer; this means that other facets of the God-man relationship which are associated with the English term "prayer" will not be considered. This is in no way meant to reflect on the relative importance of prayer as confession, adoration, thanksgiving or mystical communion.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>It is unfortunate that the English term "prayer" derives from the Latin precari, "to request," and now largely connotes the ideas of asking or entreating (cf. "Prayer," Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language [2nd edition], p. 1940). As Frank Staggs notes (New Testament Theology, p. 279), the New Testament meaning of prayer is found in the various Greek terms which are used, not the single English term used in translation.

It should be noted that there is some difficulty in separating the meaning of petitionary and intercessory prayer. As has already been seen, intercession is merely petition on behalf of a third party. This thesis is intended to treat the problem of petition plus the added problem of petition on behalf of another person; thus, the terms intercession and petition will be largely interchangeable, with the term petition being used in situations where the writers in question--whether biblical or modern--do not deal specifically with intercession. In such cases, the principles involved in a view of petitionary prayer will be assumed to have implications for intercessory prayer, for both petition and intercession share the common problems of God's relationship to the natural order and God's responsiveness to human will.

A second limitation of this thesis is its historical and theological scope. No attempt will be made to trace the historical shifts in interpreting intercessory prayer from the post-apostolic Church through the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Such a study would be immensely valuable for one's perspective, but time and space limitations forbid

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<sup>12</sup>For a brief summary of the history of prayer from the New Testament era to the twentieth century, cf. James Leo Garrett, "Prayer," ESB, II, 1102-1103; also cf. H. Trevor Hughes, Prophetic Prayer: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Prayer to the Reformation.

its inclusion here. The scope of the thesis is limited to Protestant writers of the twentieth century, the earliest book given major attention being Harry Emerson Fosdick's The Meaning of Prayer (1915).<sup>13</sup> This means, unfortunately, that the great body of Roman Catholic and Orthodox writing on the subject cannot be considered. Such a study would, along with a survey of historical developments, greatly enhance one's appreciation for the role of the "intercessor." The monastic tradition, with its emphasis on lives devoted to both prayer and service for others, is an obvious example of the crucial role intercessory prayer has played in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

A third limitation is one imposed by the materials available. That is, this study will be limited to those men who have explicitly stated their particular understanding of petitionary and intercessory prayer. No attempt will be made to surmise a man's theology of prayer if he has not addressed himself to that subject. It would, of course, be interesting to examine a man's theology in light of his written prayers--one thinks immediately of John Baillie's A Diary of Private Prayer or Walter Rauschenbusch's

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<sup>13</sup>Two other major treatises on prayer were published about the same time: P. T. Forsyth's The Soul of Prayer (1916) and James Hastings' The Christian Doctrine of Prayer (1915).

Prayers of the Social Awakening--but that would be another thesis.

### Methodology

The methodology to be followed in this thesis is dictated by the limited purposes which have already been described. Part One will consist of a survey of the underlying presuppositions of petition and intercession in the biblical record. The justification for this section is this writer's conviction that the Christian must always measure his thinking by that of the men who were the recipients of the primary revelation which is at the foundation of his faith. This does not mean an uncritical acceptance of all one finds in the Bible--the biblical Weltanschauung must be distinguished from the Weltbild--but it does mean that the biblical understanding of the nature of God and his relationship with man must not be forgotten.

Part Two will consist of four chapters, each of which treats two or three representatives of a distinctive understanding of God's relationship to the world as affected by man's prayers of petition and intercession. The meaningfulness of intercessory prayer is determined by the extent to which God takes man's will into account in his ordering of the universe; it is also determined by the extent of God's power to shape the world order to his own

ends--thus the problem of the sovereignty of God in relation to "natural law." Each of the men considered will be evaluated for the inner consistency of his own position and the contribution of his understanding to the question of the possibility of intercessory prayer.

Part Three will be a brief constructive statement of this writer's own understanding of the meaning of intercessory prayer. Such a statement should not be considered final, but merely the writer's attempt to confess his own position in light of the intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage undertaken thus far. This section will also indicate possible directions for further research into the question of intercessory prayer.

PART ONE

INTERCESSORY PRAYER AND THE TEACHINGS  
OF THE SCRIPTURE

## INTRODUCTION

Part One will be a treatment of the biblical materials relating to the question of petitionary and intercessory prayer. Chapter I will deal with Old Testament and Rabbinic sources; Chapter II will deal with the additional contributions to the understanding of prayer which are found in the New Testament materials.

The purpose of this section is not to treat the subject of prayer as a whole, nor is it to engage in lengthy exegesis and discussion of all those passages which are important for a study of petition and intercession. Rather, this section will attempt to isolate in brief fashion those presuppositions about God, man and the world which undergirded biblical man's belief in intercessory prayer.

## CHAPTER I

### INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND IN LATER JUDAISM

The words of the Psalmist, "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come" (65:2), are characteristic of the Old Testament as a whole. The prayers of the Old Testament reflect, of course, the primitive concepts of the relationship between man and God out of which the Israelites emerged.<sup>1</sup> Hebrew prayer must not, however, be judged in terms of its origin. Even though prayer was originally limited to requests for assistance, deliverance, or the satisfaction of a definite desire, Hebrew prayer moved beyond this stage to a more refined, moral concept of God and prayer. At this point, "the petition for God's help and favor in the battle against sin [came] into prominence."<sup>2</sup> Hebrew prayer expressed

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<sup>1</sup>The verbs hitpallel, from the root "to cut," and hilla, "to stroke," recall the customs of cutting the flesh in order to influence the deity (cf. I Kings 18:28), or stroking or kissing the image of one's god (cf. Hosea 13:2); cf. Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, I, 172, and I. Abrahams, "Some Rabbinic Ideas on Prayer," The Jewish Quarterly Review, XX (1908), 272. For a study of Hebrew words for prayer, cf. Johannes Herrmann, "Prayer in the OT," IDNT, II, 785-790, and C. W. F. Smith, "Prayer," IDB, III, 858.

<sup>2</sup>Max Joseph, "Prayer," UJE, VIII, 618; cf. G. Ernest Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment, pp. 77-93,

itself in praise of God's power and majesty in the created order<sup>3</sup> and of his miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt.<sup>4</sup> Israel expressed its thanks to God for triumph over its enemies and for the unmerited selection of Israel as his people.<sup>5</sup> "In ordinary prayer-life petition occupies a foremost place."<sup>6</sup> The pious asked God for children, crops, sight for the blind, deliverance from enemies, long life (Ps. 34:13, 91:16), and even the revival of the dead (I Kings 17:20). Yet, as Heinisch has pointed out, "requests for spiritual blessings were not absent from their prayers."<sup>7</sup> Solomon prayed for wisdom, the Psalmist prayed for trust (Ps. 42) and forgiveness (Ps. 51), and Moses asked to behold the glory of God with his own eyes (Ex. 33:18).

As Trevor Hughes has pointed out, it was "prophetic prayers" of petition and intercession that were most characteristic of Hebrew worship. It was because of his need

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for an elaboration of the stand against magic and divination taken in the Old Testament.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Pss. 8, 33, and 104.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Ex. 15:1-21; Ps. 77:11 ff.; Ps. 105.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Ps. 100.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Heinisch, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 219.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

that man approached the God who was both transcendent and immanent. Hebrew prayer sprang out of a relationship with God that was both intimate and aware of his terrible majesty.<sup>8</sup> As opposed to mystical prayer,<sup>9</sup> the prophetic prayer of the Hebrew was evidence of man's freedom to stand over against God and make his requests known to One who might or might not answer the request. If God spoke to his representatives "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11), a prophet like Jeremiah could feel free to call God's justice into account (Jer. 12:1 f.). It is to intercessory prayer that we must now turn.

#### I. INTERCESSORY PRAYER ACCORDING TO THE TRADITIONS

It is most unusual to find someone who would deny the place of intercessory prayer in Hebrew religious thought.<sup>10</sup> Most would see the New Testament concept of Christ as the supreme mediator and intercessor as growing out of a tradition in which prophetic figures such as

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<sup>8</sup>H. Trevor Hughes, Prophetic Prayer, pp. 13-22.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Edmund Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 176.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. J. W. Bowker, "Intercession in the Qur'an and the Jewish Tradition," Journal of Semitic Studies, XI, No. 1 (Spring, 1966), 81: "There is . . . in the Jewish tradition a considerable uncertainty or hesitation about intercession."

Abraham and Moses had stood between God and man.<sup>11</sup> Eichrodt has described this intercessory function among Israel's prophets as

a complete turning of Man to God, a becoming one with the will of God to the point of self-sacrifice, and therefore as something to which God ascribes atoning value sufficient for the removal of guilt.<sup>12</sup>

Such self-sacrifice is not, however, efficacious in its own right, for its effectiveness is due to its being a "reflection of God's will in a human soul."<sup>13</sup> Though the prophets are most often thought of as preachers, "they had first pled with God for the men to whom they afterwards appealed in His name."<sup>14</sup>

The prophet's relationship with the people whom he

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. Heinisch, op. cit., p. 223, for examples of requests for prophetic intercession. A. R. Johnson, The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel, says that during the monarchy the professional prophet had a dual role in the cultus. "He was not only the spokesman of Yahweh; he was also the representative of the people" (p. 75). As such, he was an expert in the technique of prayer. H. H. Rowley, Worship in Ancient Israel, pp. 144-75, expresses doubt that the canonical prophets were cultic prophets, though he does concede that canonical utterances could have been modelled on liturgical forms. Cf. also Hans-Joachim Kraus, Worship in Israel, pp. 101-12.

<sup>12</sup>Eichrodt, op. cit., II, 450.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.; cf. Jacob, op. cit., p. 243. One should note the later Pauline concept that prayer is due to the operation of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>14</sup>John E. McFadyen, The Prayers of the Bible, p. 57.

represents is not always smooth. There is a "gap as well as a bridge" because the prophet "stands on their behalf with a God who is both for and against them, in mercy and in judgment."<sup>15</sup> Though the prophet atones for his people by his prayers, the prayers remain subject to God's will. It is true that "for their sake God will pardon and save men," but this does not mean God is bound by their wishes.<sup>16</sup> Frequently, an act of intercession is not wholly successful, as is the case of Abraham's prayer for Sodom (Gen. 18) and Moses' prayer for the apostate Israelites (Ex. 32:30 ff.).

In order to see the development of the understanding of intercessory prayer in Israel, the examples of intercessory prayer shall be viewed as they occur in the JE tradition, the monarchic sources, the eighth and seventh century prophets, the Deuteronomic school, and the Priestly and post-exilic sources.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Gordon P. Wiles, "The Function of Intercessory Prayer in Paul's Apostolic Ministry with Special Reference to the First Epistle to the Thessalonians" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, Yale University, 1965), pp. 19-20. Cf. Ex. 32:30-34 and Jer. 14:1-15:1.

<sup>16</sup>Th. C. Vriezen, An Outline of Old Testament Theology, p. 294.

<sup>17</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., pp. 858-61, has treated the broader aspects of prayer under this developmental outline. Though brief, it is perhaps the most carefully developed theology of prayer in the Old Testament in English.

### The JE Tradition

C. W. F. Smith has characterized the JE tradition as one in which prayer is depicted as a conversation between God and man.<sup>18</sup> It is assumed without question that God is personal--this is what makes the conversation possible--to the extent that the weeping of the small child Ishmael comes to his ears as a prayer (Gen. 21:16-17).

Other than Jacob's blessing of Joseph and his two sons (Gen. 48:15-16) and Isaac's prayer that Rebekah might cease being barren (Gen. 25:21), only Abraham and Moses are portrayed as intercessors in the JE tradition. The prayer of Jacob recalls the past care of Elohim and desires that these blessings continue through the multiplying of his descendants.

Abraham has two intercessory prayers attributed to him. In Genesis 18:23-31, where Abraham intercedes on behalf of the sinful city of Sodom, the basis for the appeal is God's position as "Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25), that is, his superior position of understanding and his consistency with his own standards. Gerhard von Rad notes that this passage questions the traditional concepts of collective thinking--that is, guilt by association--and asks if it means that a number of righteous people

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 858.

might have a preserving function for the whole.<sup>19</sup>

It is the product of independent reflexion upon Jahweh's [righteousness]--it comes before us as . . . something which took the vicarious preserving function of the [righteous] as its starting point.<sup>20</sup>

In some respects, Genesis 18:23 ff. is similar in content to Isaiah 53:5, 10 which concerns the Servant whose righteous suffering works for the salvation of "many."

The other intercessory prayer attributed to Abraham is found in Genesis 20:17, where he prays for healing of Abimelech and his wives so that they might bear children, the implication being that the barrenness in Abimelech's household is due to his having taken Abraham's wife into his harem. It is specifically observed that Abraham's ability to pray effectively is due to the fact that he is a prophet (Gen. 20:7).

There are six references to intercessory prayer by Moses.<sup>21</sup> A form of intercession is found in Exodus 5:22-23, where Moses complains that God has misled him in sending him

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<sup>19</sup>Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, I, 395.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>"The power of intercessory prayer is an important element of Biblical faith . . . ; and it is a significant part of the work of Moses in all strata of the narrative about him. . . . He was not only the charismatic leader of the people, he was also mediator, intercessor, and bearer of their 'sin.'" G. Ernest Wright, "The Book of Deuteronomy: Introduction and Exegesis," IB, II, 395-396.

back into Egypt. The implication is that God should get on with what he promised. Such frustrated accusations are to be contrasted with the careful reasoning of Abraham (Gen. 18:22 ff.) and the bargaining of Jacob (Gen. 28:20-22). In Exodus 8:8-14, Pharaoh, the representative of the anti-Yahweh forces, recognizes Moses' prophetic, and therefore intercessory, powers, and asks that Moses pray that the plague of frogs be removed from his land.

Exodus 32:11-13 and 31-32 contain Moses' classic plea for mercy for Israel after her act of apostasy in building the Golden Calf.<sup>22</sup> It is a noble prayer, more akin to Abraham's intercession for Sodom than Jacob's ego-centered prayer at Bethel.<sup>23</sup> The basis for Moses' intercession is,

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<sup>22</sup>Martin Noth (Exodus, p. 244) says that verses 9-14 are a deuteronomistic addition explaining the sparing of Israel; verses 30-34 are a literary addition from a period prior to the downfall of Samaria which has reference to the cultic apostasy of Jeroboam I--an apostasy which must be expiated at some point in the future (Ibid., p. 251).

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Rowley, op. cit., p. 53. The event recorded in Exodus 32 is fraught with difficulties. It is most likely that the "bull" image of the Exodus is to be seen as a portable throne for the invisible Yahweh. The use of "bull" images in Canaan, however, was too similar to the practices of the Baal cult to be acceptable--cf. the use of "bull" images by Jeroboam I (I Kings 12) and the reaction this caused in orthodox circles. The fact that such a practice became the symbol of Israel's tendency to break the covenant at the very beginning of the Exodus does not affect the significance of Moses' role as intercessor. Cf. W. J. Harrelson, "Calf, Golden," IDB, I, 489.

first, that it would destroy what God had already done if Israel were to be consumed. Second, such action on God's part would mean breaking the covenant made with Israel's fathers. Third, God must be true to himself and his purposes. In the covenant made with Abraham, Moses says, "Thou didst swear by thine own self" (Ex. 32:13; cf. Gen. 22:16). Moses now offers himself as a substitute for Israel, but this is rejected (Ex. 32:32-34). To the extent that the request is answered, it is because of Moses' intimate relationship with God. God knows Moses' "name," and Moses has found favor in God's sight (Ex. 33:17). It should be noted that the Deuteronomic parallel to this account, Deuteronomy 9:26-29, is not as profound as the JE version, for it leaves out the connection of intercessory sacrifice with intercessory prayer.

It will be noted that Exodus 32:14 implies that Moses' prayer was completely efficacious: "And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people." Exodus 32:33-34, however, implies a judgment on the leaders rather than the nation as a whole. In any case, the intercession had some effect, for the living relationship between God and man is as changeable as that between man and man. Vriezen points out that God is constantly renewing his relationship with man within the context of the demand of every new situation in which his will may be realized.

Thus God's 'inconstancy' in the Old Testament is a sign of God's love and fidelity to man, and evidence of his omnipotence to do as He pleases.<sup>24</sup>

Exodus 34:9 also claims to be a prayer for forgiveness of Israel's sin. The request, "take us for thy inheritance," implies the material benefits of long life, many children, and the gift of a land in which to live.

Numbers 12:13 is the only personal intercession of Moses. Here he asks for the healing of Miriam's leprosy. Numbers 14:13-19 is Moses' prayer for Israel after she reacted with fear at the report of the spies sent into Canaan and wished to return to Egypt. Moses' prayer appeals to God's pride; verses 13-16 point out the shame attaching itself to a God who cannot carry out his purposes. In addition, appeal is made to the nature of God in verses 17-19. God is portrayed as powerful, patient, full of chesed, merciful, and just. Chesed is mentioned twice in this section as characteristic of God. In verse 19, appeal is made to God's covenant and past action with his people: "according as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

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<sup>24</sup>Vriezen, op. cit., p. 240. Cf. the unsatisfactory view of Heinisch, op. cit., p. 73, that passages which imply a change in God's attitude must be understood in light of God's foreknowledge of the conversion of sinners. "Having always known what measure of intercessory prayer would be made in the course of time, God shaped His plan of salvation accordingly from all eternity." The same argument is found in Origen's treatise "On Prayer," Chaps. VI-VII.

### The Elijah and Elisha Narratives

The Elijah stories portray a powerful prophet whose prayers are infinitely superior to those of the prophets of Baal "whose god is no less contemptible to Elijah than their mode of praying."<sup>25</sup>

Three intercessory prayers are attributed to Elijah and Elisha. In I Kings 17:21 Elijah prays for the recovery of a dead child; a similar healing is attributed to Elisha in II Kings 4:32-35. Herrmann points out that the actions described in the two accounts are "magical" actions which have been divested of their magical character by the insertion of prayers to Yahweh. "Obviously in Yahweh religion there is a force at work to crowd out the magic which had penetrated from primitive religion, and to replace it by prayer."<sup>26</sup> II Kings 6:17 also contains an intercessory prayer by Elisha. In this case, the object of prayer is spiritual insight for his servant.

### Monarchic Sources

Samuel, the prophet-priest, was sought out by the

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<sup>25</sup>Herrmann, op. cit., p. 796; cf. I Kings 18:26-28.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 795; cf. II Kings 4:34-35 with I Kings 18:42. The use of the same verb to describe Elijah's stretching himself out on the ground and on the child may indicate an attitude of magic rather than prayer, for we are not actually told Elijah prayed for rain. Note, however, that James 5:18 assumes that prayer is implied in the text.

people of Israel to pray for them: "Do not cease to cry to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines" (I Sam. 7:8). Even when rejected in favor of a king, Samuel assured his people that he would not cease to pray for them (I Sam. 12:19, 23). I Samuel 2:25, however, expresses doubt that intercessory prayer is efficacious on behalf of those who, like the sons of Eli, had sinned against the Lord: "If a man sins against a man, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?"

David prays for Bathsheba's first son (II Sam. 2:16), but the prayer is not answered. He also prays for Israel when it is struck by a pestilence and asks that his life might be substituted for his people (II Sam. 24:17). Von Rad has made the interesting observation that the compiler of the "Succession Document," which deals with the Davidic dynasty, was a theologian with a "very well-defined idea of God's relation to their [Israel's] history."<sup>27</sup> Here the older idea of Yahweh's control of history as being through miracles is replaced by a secular understanding in which Yahweh's control appears not intermittently but "continuously permeates all departments of life."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Von Rad, op. cit., I, 314.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 315-16. For example, David's prayer in

II Kings 19:14-19 is Hezekiah's prayer for help as he stands forth as the representative of Israel. The prayer acknowledges God as sovereign "of all the kingdoms of the earth," the Creator of "heaven and earth" (19:15). God's covenant with Israel is implied in the title "God of Israel" (19:15).

In II Chronicles 20 there is the record of Jehoshaphat's calling for a day of national prayer and fasting before he led his forces against the Moabites and Ammonites. The king's prayer is followed by a divine oracle--uttered here by a Levite--which assures the king and the people that God will aid them in their time of fear. The prayer speaks of past deliverances when Israel was given the land promised her in the Covenant. Now the powerlessness of the people is contrasted to the might of God's rule over both the heavens and the nations.<sup>29</sup>

#### The Eighth- and Seventh-Century Prophetic Tradition

It has often been noted that the greatest legacy of the prophets has been their understanding of the moral requirements of the God who cannot be manipulated by mere ritual and prayer. Prayer must be a matter of the heart;

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II Sam. 15:31 is answered in the person and efforts of his friend Hushai.

<sup>29</sup>Rowley, op. cit., pp. 195 f.

the best sacrifice is the confession that one has been unfaithful to Yahweh.<sup>30</sup>

As has been noted, the prophets are, supremely, the intercessors for Israel.

Practically all the intercessory prayers of the Old Testament are offered either by prophets or by men--such as Abraham and Job--whom later ages idealized as prophets.<sup>31</sup>

Hezekiah asks Isaiah to pray for Jerusalem (II Kings 19:4); Amos twice tries to intercede for Israel (Amos 7:2, 5); but perhaps the most informative of all the prophetic figures at this point is Jeremiah, "the first historical person whose life of prayer can be known."<sup>32</sup> Three commands not to pray for Israel indicate that Jeremiah was one who habitually did pray for the people.<sup>33</sup> In Jeremiah 18:20 there is the explicit reference to Jeremiah's role as an intercessor: "I stood before thee to speak good for them, to turn away thy wrath from them." Zedekiah, the king, requests prayer from Jeremiah during a siege of Jerusalem (Jer. 37:3), and the people come to Jeremiah

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<sup>30</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 859.

<sup>31</sup>McFadyen, op. cit., p. 59; cf. Gen. 20:7 and Job 42:8.

<sup>32</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 860. Cf. also Felix Perles, "Prayer: Jewish," ERE, X, 192, and Herrmann, op. cit., p. 798.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11.

after Jerusalem has fallen and Gedaliah assassinated with the request: "Pray to the Lord your God for us, for all this remnant . . . , that the Lord your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing we should do" (Jer. 42:2-3). McFadyen suggests that it was a combination of awareness of their own sin (Jer. 7:9 ff.) and the acknowledged efficacy of a prophet's prayers that caused the people to approach Jeremiah.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that obedience is seen as a necessary element in the answering of their prayers (Jer. 42:5-6).

Jeremiah's prayers are "the reaction of the sensitive human soul to a God who is both above and near."<sup>35</sup> Jeremiah's prayers are filled with recriminations and challenges to God. He can talk to God in such a way because God is so real to him; God is the friend to whom the prophet takes his troubles and before whom he pours out a perplexed and indignant heart. For Jeremiah, prayer is a conversation rather than a speech, a dialogue rather than a monologue.<sup>36</sup>

The use of the word פָּגַע in the sense of "encounter"

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<sup>34</sup>McFadyen, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>35</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 860.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. the study of the "inner life" of Jeremiah in John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, pp. 201-30.

or "entreat" is important in Jeremiah. Meeting and entreating imply a relationship. Thus, Jeremiah derisively accuses the false prophets of being unable to "make intercession" (Jer. 27:18), for they are not God's prophets; they have no relationship with God. The fact that God commands Jeremiah not to intercede for Judah (Jer. 7:16) implies that Jeremiah's intercession is particularly effective due to his relationship with God.

Of great importance in understanding Jeremiah is the "struggle in Jeremiah's mind between fidelity to his prophetic commission and the natural feelings and impulses of his heart."<sup>37</sup> The one whose heart is broken when his people are broken (Jer. 8:21) and whose eyes are a "fountain of tears" (9:1) feels compelled to pray for his people (14:7-9).<sup>38</sup> Though he learns that such intercession is to be of no avail, that it is not Yahweh's will, still it is inevitable. "And it [is] partly through the rejection of his prayer for others that he learned to pray for himself."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 210; cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, The Cross in the Old Testament, pp. 154-73.

<sup>38</sup>It should be remembered, however, that Jeremiah also interceded against his enemies, Jer. 18:19-23.

<sup>39</sup>Skinner, op. cit., pp. 227-28.

### The Deuteronomic Tradition

It is difficult to trace all examples of intercessory prayer which may have been influenced by the Deuteronomic tradition. In a general way, it may be said that Deuteronomic prayer

emphasizes the necessity of recollecting God's mighty acts; the memory is to be stored in the heart to prompt proper prayer (Deut. 4:9, 32-39; 7:18-19; 8:2, etc.; cf. I Kings 8:23-27). Moses' own prayers start with a recollection, . . . claiming God's previous mercies (e.g., Deut. 9:25-29).<sup>40</sup>

Deuteronomy 5:5, 24-27 and 9:18 allude to the fact that Moses stands between Israel and Yahweh. Two intercessory prayers are attributed to Moses: the plea for Israel in Deuteronomy 9:26-29 is, as noted above, based on Yahweh's past acts of mercy and deliverance. Deuteronomy 33:1-29 is intercession in the form of a blessing for the twelve tribes of Israel.

### The Post-Exilic Period<sup>41</sup>

Until the Exile, prayers are rather informal and individual.<sup>42</sup> The development of regular services of prayer does not begin until after the fall of Jerusalem

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<sup>40</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 859.

<sup>41</sup>For a general discussion of prayer in the post-Exilic period, cf. C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., pp. 860-61, and Herrmann, op. cit., pp. 798-800.

<sup>42</sup>Perles, op. cit., p. 191.

and the Exile of 586 B.C.<sup>43</sup> Joel 2:17 indicates that the priests took over the intercessory function of the prophets; the rebuilt Temple soon became the focus of intercessory prayer,<sup>44</sup> and the high priest represented the people in the Holy of Holies,<sup>45</sup> though intercession could still be made by the people as well.<sup>46</sup>

Ezekiel prays for Jerusalem twice (Ezek. 9:8, 11:13), and II Chronicles 30:18-19 is a priestly version of Hezekiah's prayer for the ceremonially unclean at the celebration of Passover. Nehemiah 1:4-11, from the fifth century, B.C., is a confession and intercession, the intercession being based upon the faithfulness of God to the people whom he had brought out of Egypt (1:10). Daniel 9:3-19 is likewise a moving prayer of confession and intercession from the second century before Christ.

Abraham's prayer for Ishmael (Gen. 17:18) is generally regarded as part of a Priestly addition to Genesis, while Isaiah 53:12 portrays Israel as the Servant of

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<sup>43</sup>Harold D. Wright, "Intercessory Prayer in the New Testament" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964), p. 2; cf. K. Kohler, Jewish Theology, pp. 266 f.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Is. 56:7.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Lev. 16.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. Joel 1:14-20.

Yahweh--whether Israel as a whole or a representative is not important--who will understand his suffering as an act of intercession.

"The Psalter is a treasure-house of OT prayers."<sup>47</sup> The Psalms, most of which come from the post-Exilic period, are adaptable to both corporate and private devotion. They express joy and sorrow, praise, perplexity when God does not answer, thanksgiving, and confession of sin. "The rehearsal of God's acts in history are an integral part of the Psalms as of all biblical prayer after D."<sup>48</sup> Franz Hesse suggests that the cultic prayers of the Psalms tend to be in the form of "representative petition" rather than intercession. The individual "I" is a representative rather than a collective "I." There are, however, some exceptions such as Psalms 51:18, 122:6-9, and 3:8.<sup>49</sup>

## II. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

"From the time of Ezekiel onwards the emphasis upon

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<sup>47</sup>Herrmann, op. cit., p. 798.

<sup>48</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 861; cf. Pss. 9:1, 44:1-8, 65:5, etc.

<sup>49</sup>Wiles, op. cit., p. 21, f.n. 2, citing Franz Hesse, Die Fürbitte im Alten Testament (Inaugural Dissertation . . . Friedrich-Alexander-Universität. Erlangen, 1949), pp. 64-74.

the divine transcendence made the issue of mediation more acute."<sup>50</sup> The problem of the distance between God and man is in the background of developing apocalypticism, the developing idea of Wisdom, and Job's anguish that he cannot reach God (Job 23:3-17).<sup>51</sup> Job demands an intercessor, a mediator or redeemer (go'el) who will stand between him and God (Job 9:33; 19:23-27), while the Book of Tobit suggests that the angel Raphael intercedes on behalf of the saints (12:15).<sup>52</sup>

The Exile resulted in a felt need for a deeper devotion through prayer. With the rise of the synagogue, the sacrificial cult--long dominated by the priesthood--was gradually replaced by "congregational prayer which was no longer confined to a certain time or class."<sup>53</sup> For the first time, prayer began to develop into a system which included the Shema' and the Tephillah, a hymn plus eighteen benedictions, and other prayers.<sup>54</sup> It must be recognized,

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<sup>50</sup>Eric C. Rust, Nature and Man in Biblical Thought, p. 124.

<sup>51</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 861.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Rust, op. cit., pp. 125 ff., for a discussion of the mediating conceptions of later Judaism.

<sup>53</sup>Kohler, op. cit., p. 267.

<sup>54</sup>See Heinrich Greeven, " εὐχομαι ," TDNT, II, 800-802; Joachim Jeremias, The Prayers of Jesus, pp. 69 ff.; C. G. Montefiore, The Old Testament and After, pp. 351 ff.

however, that it is "not easy to speak of a Rabbinic conception of prayer," for rabbinic theology was a "syncretism, not a system."<sup>55</sup> It had its background in both the Bible and the traditional literature of many minds. Primitive thought stood beside the most developed; teaching on prayer ranged from the magical to the mystical.<sup>56</sup>

Prayer in the Talmudic period, like that of the entire ancient world, was based on a childlike faith which "anticipated divine interference in the natural order at any time."<sup>57</sup> If it was true that the rabbis strongly asserted that prayers may be answered, there was also the denial that prayer must be answered. The presumptuousness of Onias, the rabbi who drew a circle about himself and said he would not cross it until his prayer for rain was answered, was rebuked by some rabbis on the grounds that the efficacy of prayer is lost if reliance is placed on its efficacy.<sup>58</sup> Calculated prayer (Iyyun Tephillah), prayer

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<sup>55</sup>Abrahams, op. cit., p. 273.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid. It is obvious that all rabbinic materials do not pre-date the time of Christ. Only the Pre-Tannaitic period (c. 200 B.C.-A.D. 10) qualifies at this point. It is assumed, however, that even later rabbinic understanding reflects a general tradition which would have been fairly constant.

<sup>57</sup>Kohler, op. cit., p. 271.

<sup>58</sup>Abrahams, op. cit., p. 274.

which expected an answer as a due claim, was repeatedly denounced.<sup>59</sup> Joseph shares with the early rabbis the belief that, if prayer is the means of lifting the soul to God, petitionary prayers are always inferior to prayers of praise.<sup>60</sup> It is probably more correct to say, with Montefiore, that the rabbis did not refine the distinction between material and spiritual needs. "Whether the request was high or low, material or spiritual, it was not criticized from the metaphysical point of view."<sup>61</sup>

The rabbis did believe in intercessory prayer. The righteous were those who strengthened God by helping him to be merciful. They are symbolized by a spade or rake because

as the rake turns the grain from place to place, so the prayer of the righteous turns the attributes of God from the attribute of wrath to the attribute of mercy. (Yeb. 64a)<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Cf. Ber. 32b, 55a; Bab. B., 164b; R. H., 18a. References to the Mishna and the Talmud are abbreviated according to C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe (eds.), A Rabbinic Anthology, p. cviii.

<sup>60</sup>Joseph, op. cit., p. 618; cf. Ber. 32a.

<sup>61</sup>Montefiore, Old Testament and After, p. 354.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Kohler, op. cit., p. 272. Ber. 7a mentions God's prayer to himself: "Oh, that my mercy shall prevail over my justice."

Men are to pray for each other:<sup>63</sup>

A prayer uttered in behalf of another is answered first (Bab. K., 92a).

He who loses a chance of praying for another is termed sinner (Bab. B., 90a-91b).

Elimelech and his sons were punished for their failure to pray for their generation (Ber. 10b).

George F. Moore points out that in the first century A.D. prayers for everyday needs were in the plural. "If it [was] in his power to beseech God's compassion on another individual, it [was] a sin not to do it."<sup>64</sup>

In general, it may be said that rabbis of the Talmudic period saw prayer as a source of miraculous power, "especially the prayers of the pious, like the popular saint Onias or Hanina ben Dosa."<sup>65</sup> Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa was particularly famous for the efficacy of his prayers. He could tell whether his efforts at effecting cures were to be successful by judging how freely the prayer flowed from his lips.<sup>66</sup> The rabbis protested against praying only

<sup>63</sup>Cited in Abrahams, op. cit., p. 280.

<sup>64</sup>George F. Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, the Age of the Tannaim, II, 219; cf. also p. 208. Cf. I Sam. 12:23 and Ber. 12b.

<sup>65</sup>Kohler, op. cit., pp. 272-73. Cf. Ta'an III, 8; Ber. V, 6; Yeb. 9d.

<sup>66</sup>Judah D. Eisenstein, "Prayer: In Rabbinical Literature," JE, X, 168.

under the pressure of necessity.

Thou shalt not say, I am in prosperity, wherefore shall I pray; but when misfortune befalls me then will I come and supplicate. Before misfortune comes, anticipate and pray.<sup>67</sup>

It was recognized, however, that trouble and hardship are God's ways of bringing man to the place where he makes petition.<sup>68</sup>

The rabbis warned against "excessive pondering over prayer and its efficacy" because of the danger of weakening that childlike faith which is the basis of prayer.<sup>69</sup> It was enough to know that their prayers and needs were in the hands of the all-wise God. An anonymous prayer from the first century A.D. illustrates this attitude of trust:

The needs of thy people Israel are many, and their wit is scant. May it be Thy good pleasure, O Lord our God, to give to each one all his needs, to each several person the supply of his lack. Blessed is the Hearer of prayer.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Cited in Abrahams, op. cit., p. 278.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 276; cf. Exodus Rabba, Chap. 21.

<sup>69</sup>Kohler, op. cit., p. 272; cf. Ber. 55a.

<sup>70</sup>Quoted in Moore, op. cit., p. 215. Abrahams, op. cit., p. 288, says that Jesus' words, 'Thy will, not mine,' are the "supreme utterance of the Jewish consciousness on the subject of prayer" inasmuch as they express "confidence that God's will is man's ultimate good."

### III. PRESUPPOSITIONS OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER

It is obvious that the Israelite believed in the value of intercessory prayer. Though the isolated individual may not have been aware of it, there were certain presuppositions which undergirded this faith. Petitionary prayers, which include intercessory prayers, were based upon a confidence in the nature of God and the character of the natural order.

#### The Objective Efficacy of Words

In its more primitive stages, Israelite religion certainly had some of the flavor of Egyptian and Near Eastern belief in the physical impact of words. In a pre-logical mentality, the name of a being could not be separated from the reality itself.<sup>71</sup> For this reason, the use of a name in either blessing or cursing was quite plausible. The so-called "Execration Texts" (or curse texts) of Egypt's Middle Kingdom are examples of the practice of inscribing the name of enemies on pottery and then smashing them. This was supposed to insure the defeat of these individuals.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>G. E. Wright, Old Testament Against Its Environment, pp. 78-79.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid. Cf. James B. Pritchard (ed.), Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, pp. 326-29.

Because words had an impact, because the name of something was the same as the reality which lay behind it, care had to be taken in the use of words. Curses could not be thrown wildly. The name of the deity must be respected. It followed that the careful use of words in one's prayers to God would enhance the impact the words would have, and so the function of intercessory prayer was gradually reserved for prophetic and priestly figures. For some, at least as far down as the Exilic period, it would be the use of words in the right way and by the proper person that accounts for the efficacy of intercessory prayer.<sup>73</sup>

#### Israel as the Covenant People

The individual Israelite does not approach God in isolation but as a member of a fellowship which shares in a relationship with God as a result of his electing love.<sup>74</sup> Biblical worship is always that of the "redeemed"; the initiative is God's, not man's.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Cf. T. F. Hewitt, "Sheol and Pre-Exilic Palestinian Burial Practices" (unpublished Master's thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965), pp. 90-98, for evidence of pagan practices and beliefs among Israelites in the monarchical period.

<sup>74</sup>Cf. H. H. Rowley, The Biblical Doctrine of Election.

<sup>75</sup>William Nicholls, Jacob's Ladder: The Meaning of Worship, pp. 14-35.

In the OT, therefore, we constantly see that the individual is praying as a member of the people of Yahweh. The life of prayer . . . is determined not so much by the relationship "man to God and God to man" as by the relationship . . . "Israel to Yahweh and Yahweh to Israel."<sup>76</sup>

Herrmann's point in the above quotation is that Hebrew prayer is not directed towards a God whose reactions cannot be predicted but a God whose election of Israel and saving acts on their behalf demonstrate a "basic goodness and faithfulness towards His people."<sup>77</sup> The memory of such merciful acts on God's part became the basis for a hope in the continual coming of salvation--especially in the Psalms--"whether in relation to the whole community . . . or to the destiny of the individual."<sup>78</sup>

The earliest traditions<sup>79</sup> show an appeal to God's past acts of mercy to be one of the foundations of prayer; "this element was notably to be developed by the D school."<sup>80</sup>

The idea of Israel as the Covenant People must be

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<sup>76</sup>Herrmann, op. cit., p. 791. It should be noted that corporate solidarity and individual responsibility do not succeed each other chronologically, but exist side by side in all periods of biblical thought. H. H. Rowley, The Faith of Israel, pp. 99-100.

<sup>77</sup>Herrmann, op. cit., p. 791.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>E.g. Gen. 32:9-12; Ex. 32:13.

<sup>80</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 858.

seen in the light of the conception that Yahweh is characterized by chesed, or covenant-love.<sup>81</sup> The meaning of chesed is determined by its use in family contexts in a patriarchal society.<sup>82</sup> To say that Yahweh is bound to Israel by a covenant means Israel must be seen as a family under Yahweh. This chesed is not sentimental but is Yahweh's determination that despite Israel's failure his mercy will triumph, even if with only a remnant. Hosea 2:21, Jeremiah 3:12 f. and Isaiah 54:7 f. use chesed in describing Yahweh's relationship with his faithless wife, Israel, and thus lead to a deepening of the father-image as it applies to Yahweh.<sup>83</sup>

The intercessory prayers and petitions of the Old Testament reflect Israel's consciousness that God has chosen her in a special way. Often the prayers begin with a reminder that Yahweh has made certain promises to Israel and that to turn his back on her in a time of need--whether

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<sup>81</sup>For a full treatment of this concept, cf. Norman Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament, pp. 94-130; Eichrodt, op. cit., I, 232-39; Emmett A. Barnes, "A Study of חסד in the Pentateuch" (unpublished Master's thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965).

<sup>82</sup>Barnes, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>83</sup>Eichrodt, op. cit., I, 238. Illustrations of the conviction that God's attitude toward Israel is like that of a father toward his child can be found in: II Sam. 7:14; Hos. 11:1 ff.; Pss. 68:6; 103:13; 89:27; 27:6; Wisdom of Solomon 2:16; Sirach 23:1, 4; 51:10.

for help or for forgiveness--would be a sign of weakness to the world and of the failure of his purposes.<sup>84</sup> It is interesting that on only one occasion does the mention of the covenant precede a personal petition rather than a prayer for the nation as a whole. Jacob's prayer for deliverance from the wrath of Esau (Gen. 32:9-12) calls to mind the covenant made with Abraham. Jacob can be seen, however, as a representative figure. If this is done, the biblical witness would be united in the belief that the covenant-love of Yahweh is ground for hope that he will deliver Israel in a time of need.<sup>85</sup> Prayer, then, does not originate entirely with man, but "depends ultimately on a prior activity of God."<sup>86</sup> In the earliest narratives it is Yahweh who seeks sinful man (Gen. 3), hears the cries of Israel in Egypt (Ex. 3:7-8), and seeks out prophets for the benefit of Israel (Amos 7:15; Is. 6:8; Jer. 1:5; Ezek. 2:1-2).

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<sup>84</sup>Gen. 48:15-16; Ex. 32:11-13; Deut. 9:26-29; 21:7-8; Jer. 14:19-22; I Kings 8:23-53; Is. 63:15-64; II. Chron. 4:11; 20:6-12; II Sam. 7:18-29; Neh. 1:5-11; 13:22.

<sup>85</sup>Cf. Norman B. Johnson, Prayer in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, pp. 46-48, for examples from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of petitions in which God was reminded of past promises. Luke 1:72-75 is an example of the same theme in the New Testament.

<sup>86</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 867.

### God as Creator and Sustainer of the World

By the time of the Exile, the idea of Yahweh's creative work was taken for granted.<sup>87</sup> Israel's theocentric worship rested on the action of God and was a proclamation of that action. In revelation, God was perceived as both Creator--insofar as the processes of nature participated in and were instruments of God's action--and Redeemer. Israel's God was one God, and his action as Creator and Redeemer was one action.<sup>88</sup>

Second Isaiah showed

a conception of the divine transcendence and of the divine control over history which mark a turning-point in Jewish thought and in revelation history. He was also the first to draw out explicitly the close relationship of God to nature as the work of His hands.<sup>89</sup> It is the Lord of history who is the Creator.

Isaiah 40:26 and 44:24 indicate that the conceptions of monotheism and creatorship were bound together in Second Isaiah, where the implicit ideas of earlier centuries became explicit.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament, p. 22; Rust, Nature and Man, pp. 37 ff. The question of when and to what extent creation was first attributed to Yahweh is not important at this point.

<sup>88</sup>J. Coert Rylaarsdam, "The Matrix of Worship in the Old Testament," Worship in Scripture and Tradition, Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., editor, p. 69.

<sup>89</sup>Rust, Nature and Man, pp. 37-38.

<sup>90</sup>Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation, p. 23.

For the Hebrew to say that God was Creator was also to understand him as Sustainer.<sup>91</sup> The change from a nomadic to a settled way of life in Canaan made it inevitable that Yahweh would be associated with the normal processes of nature so important to an agricultural society. Indeed, there was a very real danger for a time that Yahwism might be absorbed in Baalism.<sup>92</sup> That danger passed, but the conviction remained that everything in nature exists only because Yahweh maintains it. Mankind, as well as all of creation, was considered dependent upon the spirit (ruach) of Yahweh for life.

When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed; when thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground (Ps. 104:29-30).

In such a thought world, miracles were possible; prayer could be answered. Wherever the forces of nature revealed themselves in a special way, there Yahweh was to be seen.<sup>93</sup> There was no idea of Yahweh's action as breaking "natural law"; rather, the world was open to his movement. Very ordinary events could be manifestations of

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<sup>91</sup>Eichrodt, op. cit., II, 151-85.

<sup>92</sup>Cf. Rust, Nature and Man, pp. 74 ff.; cf. archaeological documentation of that danger in Hewitt, op. cit.

<sup>93</sup>Vriezen, op. cit., p. 191.

Yahweh's presence, for "all nature was supernatural, and the supernatural natural."<sup>94</sup> The basis for such a belief in Yahweh's providential care was found in the historical experience of salvation.<sup>95</sup> The intimate connection between creation and salvation was understood by the unknown writer of Second Isaiah. In Isaiah 40, where the supreme power of Yahweh is illustrated by his creative acts, the writer also referred to the God who "continues to work among men in the re-creation and renewal of their lives."<sup>96</sup> The effect of a consistent belief in Yahweh's providential care was to clarify Israel's conception of the divine nature. Yahweh was, to use later terminology, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient.<sup>97</sup> Jeremiah's prayer against his persecutors (18:19-23) assumed that Yahweh already knows their evil plans. The prophets emphasized that God knew

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<sup>94</sup>Rust, Nature and Man, p. 81; cf. Eichrodt, op. cit., II, 162 ff.; Jacob, op. cit., pp. 223 ff.; Rowley, Faith of Israel, p. 58.

<sup>95</sup>Vriezen, op. cit., p. 193; Eichrodt, op. cit., II, 168 f.

<sup>96</sup>Otto Baab, The Theology of the Old Testament, p. 44; cf. Is. 40:31.

<sup>97</sup>Eichrodt, op. cit., II, 181-85; cf. Baab, ibid., pp. 177-81, for a discussion of the development of the concept of providence in relation to human freedom. The earlier period of Hebrew thought made no attempt to harmonize moral freedom with the conviction of God's effective action in all things. Later attempts to deal with the question either emphasized a doctrine of individual retribution or had recourse to a developed angelology and demonology.

the depths of every man,<sup>98</sup> while Second Isaiah stated that divine knowledge embraced all things without exception.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, prayer presupposed a God who was present and active within this world, though the Hebrew would never have made the mistake of identifying God and nature.

### God as Sovereign Will

The Hebrew never made the mistake of assuming that he had an unalterable claim on God, of degenerating into the world of magic where the power of God was subordinated to the incantations of the intercessor.<sup>100</sup> All prayers were not answered! Though God may have willed for man to confront him in the striving of prayer, still the answer was strictly God's free gift.

The way in which the intercession of an Abraham, a Moses, or a Samuel is described unambiguously subordinates their petition to God's saving dealings with his people, so that both in the acceptance and the refusal of the request the divine plan which dominates history comes to fulfilment.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Cf. Is. 29:16.

<sup>99</sup>Is. 41:22 f.; 43:10-13; 44:6-8. Cf. Eichrodt, op. cit., II, 183-84.

<sup>100</sup>Eichrodt, op. cit., II, 448-49.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 449. Cf. Gen. 18:23 ff.; Ex. 32:11 ff.; 34:8 f.; Num. 14:13 ff.; I Sam. 7:8 f.; 12:19 ff.; 15:11. Cf. also Eichrodt, ibid., I, 174, and G. E. Wright, Old Testament Against Its Environment, pp. 87 f.

### God as Personal

C. W. F. Smith says that the true basis of biblical prayer is in "God's acts of revelation--whether of judgment or of mercy."<sup>102</sup> To evoke the name of Yahweh in prayer is to evoke the presence of the God who had revealed himself in historical experience.<sup>103</sup> The God who so reveals himself is, above all things, personal; he stands over against both man and nature; his covenant with Israel is both personal and ethical in its effect.<sup>104</sup> So like man is God that, in the earlier traditions, he could be thought of as having a quasi-physical form.<sup>105</sup> So personal is God that his reactions are almost human, though the reactions are purified to be consonant with his transcendent holiness. God is angry, jealous, wrathful, merciful and loving. Most important from the viewpoint of one praying is God's love and ability to feel the pain of his people.

Second Isaiah brings together the concept of Yahweh as go'el, or Redeemer, with that of Yahweh as the unique Creator of the world and of man, the one who "rules the

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<sup>102</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 867.

<sup>103</sup>Von Rad, op. cit., I, 179-87.

<sup>104</sup>Eric C. Rust, "The Theology of the Old Testament" (unpublished class notes, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1962), p. 7. (Mimeographed.)

<sup>105</sup>Cf. Gen. 1:26; Ezek. 1:26 f.

course of celestial bodies, controls the direction of human history, and sustains all creation."<sup>106</sup> Yahweh is both the go'el, or kinsman, of Israel and the Holy Other who transcends his people and his world.<sup>107</sup> As go'el, Yahweh's personal concern is shown in the faithfulness and grace with which he protects, vindicates and sustains his people in a concrete sense; Yahweh identifies himself as Israel's "kinsman," and he fulfills the duties required of such a relationship.<sup>108</sup> Isaiah 63:16 is an example of how the idea of Yahweh as go'el is parallel to the concept of Yahweh as "Father" in the petitions of Israel.

As befits a personal God, Yahweh is capable of being merciful. Moses' prayers for an apostate and complaining Israel (Num. 14:17-19; Exodus 32:9 ff.) are appeals to the forgiving mercy of Yahweh. Likewise, Amos 7:2, 5 pleads that God's mercy will be shown the weak and pitiful nation of Israel.

Yahweh's mercy and care can be counted on because of his "righteous" nature. The root tsdhq denotes "conformity

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<sup>106</sup>Karen R. Joines, " לגי in Isaiah 40-66" (unpublished Master's thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1963), p. 90.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 91. The terms go'el and "Holy One" are used thirteen times each in Second Isaiah.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

to a norm," fidelity to a way of thinking or acting.<sup>109</sup> The idea of God as righteous, as the norm, was an ethical concept in early Israel. God showed himself to be just or righteous as he dealt fairly with those who did not live up to the norm he set.<sup>110</sup> Gradually, however, there was a movement to include the soteriological as well as the ethical in the concept of righteousness.<sup>111</sup> The sense of God's personal covenant with Israel sufficed to couple justice (righteousness) with salvation.

Yahweh's judicial righteousness secures justice for his oppressed people in the proceedings against their conquerors; "he that justifieth" [Is. 50:8 f.] makes justice to triumph.<sup>112</sup>

This equation of righteousness with salvation is seen in such passages as Is. 51:5, "My righteousness is near, My salvation is gone forth. . . ." and Ps. 98:2, "The Lord hath made known his salvation, His righteousness hath he openly shown."<sup>113</sup> The fact that the Septuagint uses

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<sup>109</sup>Jacob, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>111</sup>Norman Snaith, "Righteousness," A Theological Wordbook of the Bible, Alan Richardson, editor, p. 202.

<sup>112</sup>Gottlob Schrenk, "Righteousness," Bible Key Words, Vol. IV, J. R. Coates, editor (from Gerhard Kittel's Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament), p. 30.

<sup>113</sup>Cf. Is. 56:1; 44:13; 45:21-25. Snaith, Distinctive Ideas, pp. 51-93, has a lengthy discussion of the relationship of God's righteousness to man's salvation. The height of such interpretation is reached in Second Isaiah.

δικαιοσύνη to translate chesed makes the equation of righteousness with the gift of salvation even more explicit.<sup>114</sup>

The fact that, at least in later Jewish thought, Yahweh is thought of as for and not against his people is of utmost importance for those who pray. The fact that Yahweh is just or righteous means that they can bring their causes before him and be sure of a fair decision. So Abraham can appeal to God's fairness in the case of Sodom (Gen. 18:23 ff.) and Jeremiah can appeal to God's righteousness as he prays for the punishment of his enemies (Jer. 11:20; 20:12; 12:1-3). The fact that Yahweh judges fairly also means that he cannot be manipulated. If prayers are now answered, it is because Yahweh in his sovereign will has decided otherwise.

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<sup>114</sup>Schrenk, op. cit., p. 30. Cf. Gen. 19:19; 32:10; Ex. 15:13; 34:7; Prov. 20:28.

## CHAPTER II

### INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is time to turn to the New Testament in order to examine the place of petition and intercession in the life of Christ and among the early Christians and to distinguish those presuppositions which undergirded their belief in the efficacy of such prayer. The purpose of this chapter is not to examine the vocabulary and practice of prayer in general<sup>1</sup> nor to do an exhaustive study of intercessory prayer in the New Testament, for the latter has already been done.<sup>2</sup> The understanding of intercessory or petitionary prayer in the Synoptics will be examined first, followed by a consideration of Johannine, Pauline and other sources in the New Testament.

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<sup>1</sup>For a more complete treatment cf. Heinrich Greeven, "εὐχομαι," TDNT, II, 803-808; C. W. F. Smith, "Prayer," IDB, III, 862-64; John E. McFadyen, The Prayers of the Bible, pp. 121-45; Fred L. Fisher, Prayer in the New Testament; Frank Staff, New Testament Theology, pp. 277-85; John M. Ross, "Terms for Prayer in the New Testament" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1951).

<sup>2</sup>Two recent theses have dealt with intercessory prayer in the New Testament: Bill G. West, "A Study of Intercessory Prayer in the New Testament: With Special Reference to the Problems of Result and Operation" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957), and Harold D. Wright, "Intercessory Prayer in the New Testament" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964).

## I. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN THE SYNOPTIC TRADITION

Jesus as a Man of Prayer

That Jesus was a man of prayer is well documented in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Jesus both taught about and practiced the communion with God which we call prayer. As the child of a praying nation, Jesus not only used the prayers of Israel; he also had what Deissmann calls "a self-sustaining prayer-life."<sup>4</sup> His petitions during his prayer retreats were likely related to his mission. He prayed all night (Lk. 6:12) and before his major decisions. Luke especially indicates Jesus liked to be alone to pray.<sup>5</sup> He prayed before his baptism, in Gethsemane and upon the Cross. He used prayer to fortify his soul against yielding to the false Messianic hopes of the crowd which hoped to make him king (Jn. 6:15).<sup>6</sup> It is possible that all the acts of healing were accompanied by prayer, though prayer is only mentioned in connection with the healing of the

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<sup>3</sup>The best study of Jesus' prayer-life is Joachim Jeremias, The Prayers of Jesus; cf. also A. R. George, Communion with God in the New Testament, pp. 31-92.

<sup>4</sup>Adolf Deissmann, The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul, p. 50.

<sup>5</sup>Greeven, op. cit., II, 803.

<sup>6</sup>In a parallel account, Matt. 14:23 says that Jesus left the crowd to pray; cf. Lk. 5:15-16 where Jesus sought refuge in prayer after the news of his miraculous cures began to circulate widely.

epileptic boy (Mk. 9:14-29) and the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-44). The "looking up to heaven" (Mk. 7:34) in the case of the healing of the deaf and dumb man may also have been a reference to prayer.<sup>7</sup>

Joachim Jeremias has pointed out the evidence that Jesus kept the Jewish custom of praying three times daily: the morning and evening prayers being a combination of a recital of the Shema' and the praying of the Tephilla.<sup>8</sup> In three respects, however, Jesus shattered Jewish customs of prayer. First, Jesus was not content with liturgical prayer thrice daily. Mark and Luke both speak of his lonely vigils by night.<sup>9</sup> Second, while the Shema' and Tephilla were Hebrew prayers, Jesus used Aramaic for the formal prayer which he taught his disciples. By using the vernacular in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus removed prayer from the sphere of liturgical language and placed it "right in the midst of every day life."<sup>10</sup> Finally, Jesus broke the

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<sup>7</sup>H. van der Loos, The Miracles of Jesus, pp. 325-27. Wright, op. cit., p. 66, notes that the case of the epileptic boy was an exorcism, while the prayer in Jn. 14 was really one of thanksgiving. He argues that the Gospel writers emphasized the fact of healing, not the prayer; "they emphasized that the ones concerned for the sick brought them to Jesus, not that they prayed for them."

<sup>8</sup>Jeremias, Prayers, pp. 72-75.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 75-76.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

confines of Jewish prayer in the content of his prayers. Most particularly is this seen in Jesus' use of Abba in invoking God.

A new way of praying is born. Jesus talks to his Father as naturally, as intimately and with the same sense of security as a child talks to his father. It is a characteristic token of this new mode of prayer that it is dominated by thanksgiving.<sup>11</sup>

#### Five Prayers Attributed to Jesus

Only five actual prayers of Jesus are recorded in the Synoptics.<sup>12</sup> The genuineness of these five prayers is indicated by the fact that in two of them the original Aramaic was transliterated as well as translated.<sup>13</sup> The first of these is the prayer of joy found in Q (Lk. 10:21; Matt. 11:25-26). This is the only one of Jesus' recorded prayers in the Synoptics that does not have the characteristic of petition or intercession that Heiler says is at the heart of prophetic prayer,<sup>14</sup> though one must not

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. George, op. cit., pp. 37-57. The five do not include Mk. 7:34 ("Ephphatha"), though this omission is debatable. Cf. Deissmann, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

<sup>13</sup> Mk. 14:36; 15:34.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Heiler, Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion, p. 230. "In prophetic religion, praise and thanksgiving are secondary to petition and intercession."

judge the proportions of Jesus' prayers by the content of those which survive.<sup>15</sup>

The second prayer is Jesus' plea for deliverance from death which was uttered in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk. 14:36 and parallels).<sup>16</sup> This prayer, perhaps the most instructive of Jesus' prayers, is interesting because it combines the resignation typical of mystical prayer with the assertion of one's own will typical of prophetic prayer. Fundamentally, however, this prayer is of the prophetic type. While mystical prayer is the renunciation of one's own desires,

Christian submission . . . is not the absolute giving up of every wish, absence of will, but it is renunciation, the yielding of a definite desire and craving in the interests of a higher good.<sup>17</sup>

This prayer, with its explicit and very personal requests, indicates that petition has its integral place in Christian prayer. A. R. George sums up its importance well:

Paradoxically one must combine the naive expression of one's own will with an active, joyful surrender to

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<sup>15</sup>George, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>16</sup>A similar passage in Jn. 12:27 f. perhaps confirms the authenticity of this prayer.

<sup>17</sup>Heiler, op. cit., p. 269; cf. the discussion in George, op. cit., pp. 44-46, where the paradoxical elements in this prayer are compared with the Christological question of the two wills in Christ. George notes that "this prayer shows that the human will [of Christ] did not 'always' follow the divine, but sometimes expressed, if not asserted, itself first."

the will of God. This paradox lies at the heart of Christian prayer, and thus all sound instruction on how to pray is also necessarily paradoxical.<sup>18</sup>

A third prayer of Jesus is the intercession from the Cross. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). The authenticity of this prayer, which is found only in Luke, has been questioned on textual grounds,<sup>19</sup> but most critics regard it as genuine.<sup>20</sup> If it does reflect the insight of Christ rather than that of the early Church, the prayer is a mandate not only for intercessory prayer, but for prayer in behalf of non-believers. It is true Jesus is never reported explicitly to have directed intercession to be made for all men as Paul did (I Tim. 2:1), but Jesus did exhort his disciples to pray for those who persecuted them (Matt. 5:44; Lk. 6:28)--a much harder prayer which "includes all the lesser intercessions."<sup>21</sup> It should be noted, too, that Jesus did not hesitate to pray in a situation where human freedom was an issue. Actual forgiveness would, of course, require

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<sup>18</sup>George, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. G. B. Caird, The Gospel of St. Luke, p. 251.

<sup>21</sup>McFadyen, op. cit., p. 128. H. D. Wright (op. cit., p. 168) concludes, however, that prayer for non-believers is not emphasized. "Even when they are included, the primary objective of the prayer is almost always to produce an effect on the one praying."

repentance. Perhaps, as West has suggested, Jesus saw the possibility that prayer could "work with man's will" to bring about reconciliation between God and man.<sup>22</sup>

The fourth recorded prayer of Jesus is the prayer of despair from the Cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34, Matt. 27:46).<sup>23</sup> The prayer is a fine example of the willingness of prophetic prayer to bring its complaints before God.<sup>24</sup> It expresses, as Vincent Taylor points out, not an actual abandonment of the Son by the Father, but "a feeling of utter desolation, a sense of abandonment by the Father, an experience of defeat and despair."<sup>25</sup> The prayer is important as an example of the paradox of certainty and despair, surrender and complaint, which is characteristic of prophetic prayer; it is an example of an instinctive trust in both the sovereignty and goodness of God which is possible despite feeling or evidence to the contrary. The feeling of desolation is quite real, but it is a loneliness which must be seen

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<sup>22</sup>West, op. cit., pp. 100-101.

<sup>23</sup>A critical discussion of this passage is found in Vincent Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice, pp. 157-63, and The Gospel According to St. Mark, pp. 593-94. Cf. also George, op. cit., pp. 49-56. The saying is generally regarded as authentic.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Heiler, op. cit., pp. 240-41.

<sup>25</sup>Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice, p. 161.

paradoxically against the background of the fact that Jesus regards God as accessible in and through his prayers.

The last prayer, like the third, is found only in the Lucan sources: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46). This prayer, a quotation from Psalm 31:5, is a rather conventional prayer which may have been ascribed to Jesus at a later date,<sup>26</sup> but there is no way of making a final judgment. If it is authentic, it is an expression of the deepest commitment to a God whose basic nature is positive will toward and love for man.

#### References to Intercessory Prayers by Jesus

There are three references in the Synoptics to intercessory prayer by Jesus where the actual words are not given. The first instance is found in Matthew 19:13-15, where children are brought to Jesus "that he might lay his hands on them and pray."<sup>27</sup> Mark 10:13 ff., a parallel account, says that the purpose was that Jesus might "touch" them ( ἅψεται ), perhaps with the idea that some power or blessing flowed from this great rabbi.<sup>28</sup> By the addition

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. George, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> In the parallel accounts, Mk. 10:13-16 and Lk. 18:15-17, no mention is made of prayer.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Taylor, Mark, pp. 188, 422.

of "and pray" in verse 13, Matthew anticipates the Marcan reference to Jesus "blessing" the children (Mk. 10:16).

The second instance is from Luke's special source. Luke 22:31-32 is part of a larger unit, verses 31-33, to which has been added verse 34. The purpose of verses 31-33 is not to foretell Peter's denial but to show that "Peter will be the first to recover and restore the brethren."<sup>29</sup> There is no adequate reason for not regarding the event as historical. Satan, says Jesus, is begging for the disciples<sup>30</sup>--the "sifting" probably refers to the trial of the disciples' faith because of Jesus' death and the ensuing persecution--so Jesus's prayer is that their faith might be confirmed through Peter's faith, which would be shaken but would not fail.<sup>31</sup>

A third mention of Jesus at prayer is that of the cure of the deaf mute found in Mark 7:32-35, the details of which suggest that it was taken from an historical

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<sup>29</sup>T. W. Manson, "The Sayings of Jesus," The Mission and Message of Jesus, p. 631.

<sup>30</sup>The picture of Satan's testing the disciples is reminiscent of the Prologue to Job and Zechariah 3:1 ff.; cf. Ibid., p. 632.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.; Creed, op. cit., p. 269. Bill West (op. cit., pp. 78-79) notes that Jesus told Peter that he had been praying for him--thus, there was independent psychological value to the prayer. Jesus worked as well as prayed to strengthen Peter's faith; prayer, then, was one of the contingents, though not the only one, in Peter's "turning."

event.<sup>32</sup> The mention of Jesus' groaning is a sign of his compassion and feeling for the plight of the sufferer, while the use of ἀναβλέψας ("looking up") here and in Mark 6:41 "indicates the act of prayer."<sup>33</sup>

Petitions and Intercessions by Persons  
Other Than Jesus

Two accounts of petitionary prayer need to be noted. One is the prayer of Zacharias found in Luke 1:13. The problem here is whether the prayer which was to be answered was for a child<sup>34</sup> or whether the prayer was for the redemption of Israel and the coming of the Messiah.<sup>35</sup> If the latter, it is understandable that he would have been unprepared for the news that his own son would have a part in the coming of the Messiah.

The second prayer, that of the dying thief, is also found in Luke--Luke 23:42. Both Matthew and Mark indicate that both thieves reproached Jesus, but Luke says that one

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<sup>32</sup>Taylor, Mark, p. 352.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 355. Ezra P. Gould, The Gospel According to St. Mark, pp. 138-39, says that Jesus' actions were merely a way of communicating with the deaf man. But cf. Mk. 9:29, where it is indicated that the failure of the disciples to exorcise an epileptic boy was due to the lack of "prayer." The implication is that Jesus did pray. Matthew's parallel account (Matt. 17:20), however, omits the reference to prayer and lays the blame on lack of faith!

<sup>34</sup>Creed, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Wright, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

was penitent. Whether this is historical or is evidence of the hand of the editor at work is difficult to say. The account probably derives from the same tradition which recalled the parable of the pharisee and publican and the stories of the penitence of Zacchaeus and of the harlot.<sup>36</sup>

### Synoptic Teaching about Prayer

Mark. There is comparatively little teaching about prayer in Mark. Exorcisms require prayer (9:29); the Temple is to be a "house of prayer," not a means of making money by cheating the worshipers (11:17 f.). A similar ethical note is found in 12:40 where the external piety of scribes is judged in light of their actions. Mark 13:18 is followed by Matthew in the saying that Christians should pray that the coming tribulation should not be in winter because of the discomfort involved.<sup>37</sup> Two sayings on prayer have been attached to the story of the withered fig tree. One (11:24) assures the hearer that faith in prayer will produce an answer. The other (11:25 f.) reflects an awareness of the relationship of forgiveness and prayer

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<sup>36</sup>Creed, op. cit., pp. 284-85.

<sup>37</sup>Whether this saying should be regarded as authentic is difficult to say; cf. Taylor, Mark, pp. 498 f., 513 f. Bill West, op. cit., p. 141, accepts it as authentic and comments: "Christians can rightfully pray that the circumstances of life . . . be as mild as possible but still accomplish their purpose."

which is also seen in the Lord's Prayer.<sup>38</sup> The disciples are encouraged to "watch and pray" (14:38); the content of this admonition shows that it has an eschatological connection.<sup>39</sup> Thus, Mark indicates that prayer "must not be combined with unsocial conduct, and it is accompanied by watching for the kingdom."<sup>40</sup>

The Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is found in both Matthew and Luke, but is not usually ascribed to Q;<sup>41</sup> the two forms suggest it came from different liturgical traditions.<sup>42</sup> Both versions of the prayer occur in a catechism on prayer (Matt. 6:1-15; Luke 11:1-13), the difference being that Matthew was addressed to Jewish Christians who had learned to pray in childhood, while the Lucan version was directed to Gentile Christians who had not yet learned to pray. Of the two, the Lucan version is the more original with regard to wording. Jeremias arrives at the following as the original structure of the

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<sup>38</sup>Cf. discussion in George, op. cit., pp. 58-60, and Taylor, Mark, pp. 465 ff.

<sup>39</sup>George, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 80; C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 863.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Jeremias, Prayers, pp. 87-107, for the most recent treatment of the Lord's Prayer.

prayer:<sup>43</sup>

Dear Father  
 Hallowed be thy name.  
 Thy kingdom come.  
 Our bread for tomorrow/give us today.  
 And forgive us our debts/as we also herewith  
     forgive our debtors.  
 And let us not succumb to temptation.

Jesus' addressing of God as Abba is unique and is, as Matthew 11:27 shows, part of the revelation given him by God.

In this term abba the ultimate mystery of his mission and his authority is expressed. He, to whom the Father had granted full knowledge of God, has the messianic prerogative of addressing him with the familiar address of a son.<sup>44</sup>

But Jesus also gives his disciples the right to use the same term, to share in the same sonship with the Father. Indeed, such a relationship of childlike trust is a requirement for entrance into the kingdom of God (Matt. 18:3).<sup>45</sup> The fact that the prayer is communal is significant. That Christians pray to "our Father" about "our" sins and needs means one cannot exist in relation to the Father outside of the relationship to one's brethren. Intercessory prayer, in such a context, is not intended as an interference with the neighbor's freedom but a fulfillment of God's purpose that man become God's co-worker.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Paul's contention in Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6 that a sign of true sonship and the possession of the Spirit is the boldness to address God as Abba.

The two "Thou-petitions" may be found in longer form in the Kaddish, the Aramaic prayer which concluded synagogue services. Comparison with this prayer shows that the two petitions are for the revelation of God's eschatological kingdom.<sup>46</sup>

The two "We-petitions," for daily bread and for forgiveness, are the new material added by Jesus and are the real heart of the Lord's Prayer.<sup>47</sup> The second is eschatological in its request for mercy in the last hour of judgment. The first of the petitions is not so easily settled, however. The problem centers around the translation of ἐπιούσιον, a word found nowhere else in the New Testament. It is variously translated as "necessary for existence," "for today," "for the following day," or "for the future."<sup>48</sup> The latter gets most support, though Foerster's thorough analysis concludes that the translation should be: "which we need."<sup>49</sup> Jeremias stresses Jerome's report that the Aramaic Gospel of the Nazarenes used

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<sup>46</sup>Jeremias, Prayers, p. 98; cf. the same entreaty for the final consummation in I Cor. 16:22 and Rev. 22:20.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>48</sup>W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p. 297.

<sup>49</sup>Werner Foerster, "ἐπιούσιος," TDNT, II, 599.

machar ("tomorrow") at this point; he concludes that the original Aramaic request was: "Our bread for tomorrow, give us today."<sup>50</sup> Because machar means not only "tomorrow" but the "Great Tomorrow" in Judaism, it is possible that the reference to bread is to the "bread of life," the symbol of the age of salvation.<sup>51</sup>

The eschatological thrust of all the other petitions in the Lord's Prayer speaks for the fact that the petition for bread has an eschatological sense too, i.e., that it entreats God for the bread of life.<sup>52</sup>

Only when the bread is understood in its fullest sense does the significance of the antithesis between "for tomorrow" and "today" become obvious. The disciples were to be bold enough to ask a token of the consummation while in a world controlled by Satan.<sup>53</sup>

Care must be taken, however, not to make the bread merely symbolic. Frank Stagg suggests that Jeremias' extreme eschatological interpretation is doubtful; the prayer in Luke is for actual bread for each day's needs.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Jeremias, Prayers, p. 100.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. Lk. 22:30 where the symbols of bread and wine are connected with the consummation.

<sup>52</sup>Jeremias, Prayers, p. 101.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>54</sup>Frank Stagg, "The Journey Toward Jerusalem in Luke's Gospel," The Review and Expositor, LXIV, No. 4 (Fall, 1967), 509.

Jeremias agrees that "earthly bread and the bread of life are not antithetical."<sup>55</sup> Ordinary bread also had a significance for Jesus as a visible token of God's fatherly care for his children. Though material goods must not be overly emphasized, they do have their place. Jesus was certainly not an ascetic; he was concerned about feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, and his actions proved it.<sup>56</sup> The emphasis on a day-by-day supply may be seen as supporting the teaching about anxiety found in Luke 12:22 ff. and Matthew 6:25 ff.<sup>57</sup> Bread, then, may encompass the totality of life; "it embraces everything that Jesus' disciples need for body and soul."<sup>58</sup>

The concluding petition for preservation from temptation refers, says Jeremias, to the final great testing of the saints by the forces of evil. What is at stake is faith itself; so the petition is a plea for deliverance from apostasy.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Jeremias, Prayers, p. 101.

<sup>56</sup>Cf. E. F. Scott, The Lord's Prayer, p. 97.

<sup>57</sup>It should be remembered that Ex. 16:14-30 indicates that manna was to be given by God on a day-to-day basis.

<sup>58</sup>Jeremias, Prayers, p. 102. A. M. Hunter, A Pattern for Life, p. 71, says that the primary reference is to physical bread; "it authorizes us to ask God for the necessities of life."

<sup>59</sup>Jeremias, Prayers, p. 106. Jeremias' tendency to an extreme eschatological interpretation is apparent here.

In general, the Lord's Prayer may be described as both eschatological--though not other-worldly--and prophetic.<sup>60</sup> The primary reference seems to be to an eschatological hope, though it anticipates some "earnest" of that hope in the present time. Clearly, the Lord's Prayer indicates the priority of concern should be for the kingdom of God and then, only secondarily, for one's own personal needs.<sup>61</sup> It is in the context of the Lord's Prayer that Matthew 6:33 records: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." This admonition corresponds to Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane where the expression of his own desires is subordinated to a desire that the will of God be done.<sup>62</sup> Of course, the prayer has its corporate aspect. Others are involved in the personal need for bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from apostacy. This social aspect of prayer is so real that "whether one prays this prayer by himself or in union with others, the intercession for all the other children of God is always included."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Heiler, op. cit., pp. 248-51; cf. J.-J. von Allmen, Worship: Its Theology and Practice, pp. 158 f.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. J. S. McEwen, "Prayer," A Theological Word Book of the Bible, Alan Richardson, editor, p. 170.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. A. H. McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 89.

<sup>63</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St.

Matthew. The teaching peculiar to Matthew emphasizes that prayer, along with almsgiving and fasting, should not be done for the sake of appearance (Matt. 6:1-6), nor are prayers to be inordinately long (Matt. 6:7-8). Matthew 18:19-20 indicates that the corporate prayer of two or more disciples guarantees an answer by the Father.<sup>64</sup> It is the fact that they are disciples, and therefore make "only such requests as the Master will endorse," that is the clue to the meaning here.<sup>65</sup> Such a usage is comparable with the Johannine conception of prayer in Jesus' name. To gather and pray in the name of Jesus suggests the most intimate union with the one for whom the "name" stands. In such a union, our wills are subordinated to his will, and we pray for what God desires to give.

Q. The major teaching about prayer comes from Q and from the sources peculiar to Luke.<sup>66</sup> It is Q which records

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Matthew's Gospel, p. 264; cf. George A. Buttrick, So We Believe, So We Pray, p. 128. H. D. Wright (op. cit., pp. 46-47) says, however, that the first person plural pronouns "affirm community rather than teach intercession."

<sup>64</sup>Cf. the rabbinic parallel in Pirke 'Aboth 3:2, "If two set together and the words of the law (are spoken) between them, the divine Presence--the Shekinah--rests between them." Quoted in R. P. Martin, Worship in the Early Church, p. 29.

<sup>65</sup>McNeile, op. cit., p. 267.

<sup>66</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 863.

Jesus' admonition to pray for one's enemies (Matt. 5:44; Lk. 6:28). Likewise, it is Q which teaches that God knows man's need before man asks and that anxiety is a hindrance to prayer; the controlling desire of prayer should be a desire for the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:31-33; Lk. 12:29-31). Men are to "ask" in prayer with the confidence that they will be heard because of God's nature as Father (Matt. 7:7-11; Lk. 11:9-13; cf. Matt. 11:25-26; Lk. 10:21). Julius Schniewind<sup>67</sup> says that only by ignoring the context can Matthew 7:7-8 imply an unconditional promise for the answer of any prayer. The key lies in Matthew 7:1 (and Luke 11:13) where the gift of the Father is said to be "good things," or, as Luke puts it, "the Holy Spirit."<sup>68</sup> Q also retains the saying which recommends prayer that the Lord may send laborers into his harvest (Matt. 9:38; Lk. 10:2).<sup>69</sup>

Luke. The fact that Luke places more emphasis on

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<sup>67</sup>Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, p. 99, cited in H. D. Wright, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>68</sup>Matthew's version may be the more original; cf. Creed, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>69</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, p. 98, does not regard this as authentic, but cf. McNeile, op. cit., p. 130. H. D. Wright, op. cit., pp. 49 ff., argues that such a prayer has subjective value in that it might open the disciples' eyes to their role as laborers. The same argument is found in John A. Broadus, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, p. 211.

prayer than the other Gospels is widely recognized. It is Luke alone who relates prayer to Jesus' baptism, the calling of the disciples, the Great Confession, and the experience of the Transfiguration. Malcolm Tolbert notes that it is Luke "who shows that the Lord's Prayer was given in response to a request inspired by Jesus' own experience in prayer."<sup>70</sup>

Luke alone records what have been called the parables of importunity (Lk. 11:5-8; 18:1-8), though they may not have originally had that intention.<sup>71</sup> The first, Luke 11:5-8, contains a rhetorical question (verses 5-7) to which a negative answer is expected. Verse 8 simply reinforces that conclusion. The emphasis is not on the necessity for petition, but "the certainty that the petition will be granted."<sup>72</sup>

Interpretation of Luke 18:1-8 is complicated by the addition of an introduction (verse 1) and an application (verses 7-8). The former is obviously an addition, the purpose of which is to link this parable with that of the

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<sup>70</sup>Malcolm Tolbert, "Leading Ideas of the Gospel of Luke," The Review and Expositor, LXIV, No. 4 (Fall, 1967), 449.

<sup>71</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 863; Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, pp. 153-59.

<sup>72</sup>Jeremias, Parables, p. 159.

pharisee and the publican as examples of the proper method of prayer. Taken alone, however, the parable seems to be the conclusion to the eschatological discourse of Luke 17:20-37, and it deals with the certainty of God's vindication.<sup>73</sup> Contrary to Bultmann's opinion, verses 6-8 are to be considered authentic.<sup>74</sup> They indicate that Jesus directed attention to the figure of the judge, who eventually granted justice, and thus to God who, even more than the judge, is concerned for the plight of his elect.<sup>75</sup>

The two parables, then, seem originally to have emphasized the faithfulness of God rather than the need for importunity in prayer. Luke, however, has attempted to make 18:2-8 serve two purposes by adding 18:1 and using the parable as an example of the need for persistence in prayer even when the desired answer seems delayed. A third parable unique to Luke is found in 18:9-14, the parable of the pharisee and the publican. The point of this parable does not, however, seem to be prayer, but the freedom of God to respond to the repentant sinner and reject the self-righteous.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>C. W. F. Smith, loc. cit.

<sup>74</sup>Jeremias, Parables, pp. 155-56; cf. Bultmann, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>75</sup>Jeremias, Parables, p. 156.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., pp. 139-44. The words of the publican's

The stress in Lucan teaching, then, is on humility, penitence, confidence in God's care, and--if one accepts Luke's editorial introduction in 18:1--persistence in prayer.

## II. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

The Gospel of John is unique in that Jesus is not recalled as praying at times of crisis or decision as in the Synoptics. There is no Gethsemane prayer<sup>77</sup> or prayer from the Cross, perhaps because of the Johannine emphasis on the oneness of Jesus with the Father. The usual word for prayer in the sense of calling on God, προσεύχομαι, is not used in John. John uses ἐρωτάω of the intercession of Jesus, while αἰτεῶ is used of the "asking" which Jesus' followers are summoned to make.<sup>78</sup>

The unique emphasis in the Johannine conception of prayer is that it must be in Jesus' name (14:13 f.; 15:16; 16:23, 26), though invocation of the name does not have magical overtones.<sup>79</sup> John 14:15 indicates that those who

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prayer are taken from Ps. 51, where "a broken and contrite heart" are said to be acceptable to God.

<sup>77</sup>But cf. Jn. 12:27.

<sup>78</sup>Greeven, op. cit., pp. 806 f.

<sup>79</sup>Cf. C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John, p. 384.

pray in his name are also those who love him, "and to love Him is to follow Him in thought, word and deed."<sup>80</sup> John insists that the relationship between Jesus and his disciples is like the organic union between a vine and its branches (15:1-8). Within this union, it is possible to ask and be assured of an answer (15:7).

This organic union implies unity of will and purpose with Christ as the basis for prayer (as the branch asks only what it is in the nature of the parent stock to supply).<sup>81</sup>

The significance of John 16:23-24, where it is the Father rather than the Son who responds to the prayers,<sup>82</sup> lies in the contrast between "until now" and "in that day" (that is, the days of the presence of the risen Lord), and in the kind of prayer that is made in these two periods. In the coming period, the disciples will not "ask questions" ( ἐρωτήσετε ); instead, they will "ask for something" ( αἰτήσητε ) in the name of Jesus.<sup>83</sup> Up until Jesus' death, the disciples had primarily asked questions,<sup>84</sup> but with the gift of the Paraclete "in that day" they will, with

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<sup>80</sup>C. J. Wright, "Jesus: the Revelation of God," The Mission and Message of Jesus, p. 883.

<sup>81</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 865.

<sup>82</sup>Cf. Jn. 14:14.

<sup>83</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 412.

<sup>84</sup>Cf. Jn. 13-16.

insight into the truth, increase their joy (16:24) as they ask in Jesus' name, in accordance with the vision of the Father as Jesus had declared him.<sup>85</sup>

The "name" of the person equals the person in Hebrew thought. Used with reference to God, the "name" denotes both God's being and his historical manifestations.<sup>86</sup> To pray in the name of Christ suggests that Christians pray in him and know him; it is to pray "standing where He has brought us and in union with Him."<sup>87</sup> When the conditions have been met, when Christians abide in him, when they pray in his name, "[their] wills are identified with the will of God; [they] are then praying for what He desires to give."<sup>88</sup> The significance of this is, as Temple put it, that "the essential act of prayer is not the bending of God's will

<sup>85</sup>C. J. Wright, op. cit., p. 898.

<sup>86</sup>Cf. Johannes Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture, I-II, 247; Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 85. William C. Strickland, "The Meaning of the Name of God in Biblical Theology" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1953).

<sup>87</sup>J. Ernest Davey, The Jesus of St. John, pp. 144-45.

<sup>88</sup>William Temple, Readings in St. John's Gospel, p. 291. But cf. the view derived from the use of "in the name" in the papyri of the Hellenistic business world that the principal connotation is one of ownership. Thus, the man who believes or prays in the name of Christ acknowledges Christ's lordship and, by implication, the willingness to be Christ's servant or representative. Cf. Adolf Deissmann, Bible Studies, p. 146; James Leo Garrett, "Prayer," ESB, II, 1102.

to ours . . . but the bending of our wills to His."<sup>89</sup> For John, the prayer of an obedient follower will always be answered because he asks nothing contrary to the will of God.<sup>90</sup> There are four possible references to intercessory prayer in the Johannine Epistles. III John 2 seems to be a wish or a courtesy formula common to letters of that period.<sup>91</sup> I John 2:1 echoes Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25; 9:24 in its emphasis on the heavenly intercession of Christ, the Paraclete.<sup>92</sup> Both I John 3:22-24 and 5:14-16 emphasize the answer of prayers in which the conditions of love and obedience are present. The exception to valid intercessory prayer, I John 5:16b, may have been influenced by thought such as that found in the Epistle to the Hebrews and by the "sin against the Holy Spirit" sayings of Jesus,<sup>93</sup> and is thus questionable. Or it may refer to a sin which by its nature excludes one from the fellowship of the Church. In such case, the author may have felt that prayer availed only for those who are part of the Body of Christ,

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<sup>89</sup> Temple, loc. cit.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. I Jn. 5:14; 3:22-24.

<sup>91</sup> C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, p. 157.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 24 f.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 136 f.

the Church. Prayer for those outside the Church is not forbidden, but it is not enjoined.<sup>94</sup>

If John means the prayers of Jesus to be an example of proper prayer, then we must also note a sacrificial element in prayer. It is not merely a question of asking what God's will is, but of becoming a willing, obedient participant in that will. For Jesus to pray, "Father, glorify thy name" (Jn. 12:28), meant consciously giving up all claim to himself.

### III. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN ACTS

Luke continues in Acts the interest in prayer demonstrated in the Gospel of Luke. He is careful to point out the disciples at prayer in the upper room (1:14), at the table (2:42), in the Temple (2:46; 3:1), and in the act of choosing a successor to Judas (1:23 ff.). Prayer accompanies the selection of new ministers (6:6; cf. 13:2-3; 14:23) and the incorporation of outsiders into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (8:14 ff.), and there is an intimate relationship between prayer and the gift of the Holy Spirit (4:31; 2:1-4).

As with the portrayal of Jesus, the image of the

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<sup>94</sup>B. F. Westcott, The Epistles of St. John, pp. 192, 209-10.

early Church is that of a devout band for whom prayer was the natural and inevitable act in times of crises. The Church prayed about Peter's imprisonment (12:5);<sup>95</sup> Paul and Silas prayed when in jail (16:25). Prayer was offered by Peter at the raising of Dorcas (9:40) and by Paul when the father of Publius was healed of a fever and dysentery on the island of Malta (28:8). Stephen prayed for his persecutors as they killed him (7:59-60);<sup>96</sup> the sailors on Paul's boat prayed when threatened by a storm (27:29); Paul prayed with the Christians of Ephesus as he left them to sail for Rome (20:36).

Simon the Magician tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit (8:18 f.) but was reprovved with the admonition that he pray for forgiveness for the corruption of his heart's desires (8:22). Simon, however, thought that Peter had special power in prayer, and so he requested that Peter

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<sup>95</sup>Prayer was made *περὶ αὐτοῦ*. If *περὶ* with the genitive means "about" or "concerning," to say that the Church was asking a miraculous deliverance is an unwarranted assumption. (Cf. Arndt and Gingrich, *op. cit.*, p. 650.) The fact that Peter's release caused astonishment (12:15 ff.) may imply that the focus of the prayer was "for a clarification of their role in relationship to Peter in that particular crisis." (H. D. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-40.)

<sup>96</sup>H. D. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-35, notes that guilt could not be removed by Stephen's prayer alone, though the prayer did demonstrate a forgiving spirit such as Jesus had (Lk. 23:34). The value of the prayer may have been that it affected Saul and helped prepare him for his Damascus Road experience.

intercede for him. As there is no indication that such a request was honored, it would seem to indicate personal limitations on the efficacy of intercessory prayer. In this case, the condition of forgiveness was the preparation to receive it.<sup>97</sup>

Another reference to petition is found at the close of Paul's defense before Agrippa (26:29), where Paul says, "I would to God<sup>98</sup> that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am." The conversion of Agrippa and his court is a matter for earnest prayer; only God could accomplish the matter.<sup>99</sup>

#### IV. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN THE PAULINE LETTERS

The Pauline epistles<sup>100</sup> are primary evidence of the early Church at prayer. Paul gives thanks, petitions, praises, and invokes God's grace on his readers in almost every epistle. He tells of his own mystical experiences in prayer (II Cor. 12:1-4) and his prayers for release from

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<sup>97</sup>Cf. ibid., pp. 137-38.

<sup>98</sup> Εὐξαίμην is derived from εὐχομαι, "to pray."

<sup>99</sup>Greeven, op. cit., p. 776.

<sup>100</sup>It is assumed here that Ephesians and the Pastorals may not be Pauline, though they contain Pauline elements. They will be treated in the following section. This writer realizes the complexity of the issue. Cf. A. M. Hunter, Interpreting the New Testament, 1900-1950, pp. 62-64; Werner G. Kümmel (ed.), Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 247-72.

his "thorn in the flesh" (II Cor. 12:7-10). He prays for the sanctification of his people (Phil. 1:9-11; I Thess. 3:12-13), for the success of his ministry (II Thess. 3:1-2), and for the harmony of the Church (Rom. 15:5).

Eric Jay's comments about the New Testament epistles in general certainly apply to Paul's letters.

The Epistles strengthen the evidence that prayer was seen to be of the essence of the Christian life. Not one of the Epistles is without some assurance to its readers of the writer's prayers, some request for their prayers, or some reference to prayer. Many of them include prayers, blessings, and thanksgivings. . . . We are made to realize that these were letters passing between men who knew themselves to be united by the spiritual bond of prayer.<sup>101</sup>

Paul himself is characteristically unselfish in his prayers. His recorded requests are nearly always for others. For himself he prayed only that he might be a more worthy instrument for the propagation of the Gospel. He prays to visit Rome and Thessalonica, but only that he might contribute something to the churches (Rom. 1:11; I Thess. 3:10-11). He prays for deliverance from "wicked and evil men" (II Thess. 3:2; cf. Rom. 14:30 f.), but even that is "really a prayer that his work, and the work of the Lord--which was the same--should move on unhindered."<sup>102</sup>

Only once did Paul pray for something very personal.

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<sup>101</sup>Eric G. Jay, Origen's Treatise on Prayer, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup>McFadyen, op. cit., p. 152.

The "thorn in the flesh" which he wished removed (II Cor. 12:7-10) is most commonly regarded as a physical disability.<sup>103</sup> Philip E. Hughes<sup>104</sup> traces interpretations of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" from Tertullian (headache) to William Ramsay (malarial fever) to Ph. H. Monoud (pain at the unbelief of his fellow Jews). While most speculate a physical disorder, the anonymity of the affliction has the value of allowing interpreters in different situations to identify with Paul.<sup>105</sup> It is noteworthy that the petition was denied. The reaction, however, was not bitterness, but a rejoicing that his weakness resulted in a more intimate realization of the power of Christ. Even a negative answer to prayer was related in some way to Paul's apostolic ministry,<sup>106</sup> for his weakness became strength when used in behalf of Christ (12:10).

It is intercessory prayer, however, which plays the greatest part in the life of Paul. Gordon P. Wiles has analyzed the intercessory prayer passages in Paul

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<sup>103</sup>Cf. Gal. 4:13 f.

<sup>104</sup>Philip E. Hughes, Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, pp. 442-46.

<sup>105</sup>Cf. Jean Héring, La Seconde Epitre de Saint Paul aux Corinthiens, p. 96.

<sup>106</sup>Philip Hughes, op. cit., pp. 441-54.

according to four classes:<sup>107</sup> (1) intercessory wish-prayers, including blessings, cursings, and some passages with a future indicative verb instead of an optative; (2) intercessory prayer-reports; (3) paraenetic references to intercessory prayer, i.e., requests for and exhortations to prayer; (4) didactic and speculative references to intercessory prayer.

There are forty references in the first class, most of which are "grace blessings" at the beginning or end of the letter. These may be viewed as "prayers transposed in such a way as to fit into a letter,"<sup>108</sup> but it is perhaps wise to note that such benedictions are not prayers in the usual sense of the word. Rather they may be only the expression of wishes or desires.<sup>109</sup>

There are nineteen intercessory prayer-reports in class two, and there are three borderline possibilities. Paul reports his prayer that he might come to Rome (Rom. 1:9-10; cf. I Thess. 3:10), his prayer for the salvation of

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<sup>107</sup>Wiles, op. cit., pp. 23-25. Wiles includes Ephesians, but not the Pastorals, in his investigation. He also delineates the three problems involved in studying intercessory prayers in Paul: (1) background; (2) the "epistolary nature of the evidence"; (3) the difficulty of distinguishing intercessory prayer from representative and corporate petition (pp. 9-12).

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 29. They can be transposed back into direct prayers by, for example, changing the words for God from the nominative to the vocative case.

<sup>109</sup>H. D. Wright, op. cit., pp. 75 ff.

the Jews (Rom. 10:1; cf. 9:1-3), his prayers for spiritual maturity among his converts (II Cor. 13:7 ff.; Phil. 1:9-11; II Thess. 1:11 f., etc.), the prayers of Judean Christians for the Corinthian Church (II Cor. 9:14), and the prayers of Epaphras for the Church at Colossae (Col. 4:12 ff.). Paul also mentions certain of his prayers which are partially thanksgiving and partially intercessory (Phil. 1:3; Col. 2:1-3).

Wiles's class three is composed of twelve requests for or exhortations to prayer. The requests for prayer relate to his ministry, while the exhortations to prayer emphasize the need for constant, steadfast petition (Col. 4:2-4; I Thess. 5:17 f.; Rom. 12:12) and the need for unanxious trust in God (Phil. 4:6 f.).

Class four includes Paul's teaching about prayer and some rather speculative references to the working of intercessory prayer.<sup>110</sup> The unique contribution of Paul to the understanding of prayer is the activity of the Spirit in prayer.<sup>111</sup> Such an emphasis as is presented in

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<sup>110</sup> The latter category includes Paul's reference in Rom. 11:2 ff. to the intercession of Elijah for Israel and the vague possibility that I Cor. 11:10 may refer to the intercession of angels.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Dale Moody, Spirit of the Living God: The Biblical Concepts Interpreted in Context, pp. 121-23; R. B. Hoyle, The Holy Spirit in St. Paul, pp. 82 ff.

Romans 8:14, 26-27 and Galatians 4:6 is never found this way in the Rabbis.<sup>112</sup> If the Christian approaches God with freedom and confidence, it is because the Christian is a man rather than a slave in the presence of God. As Galatians 4:6 puts it: "Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"<sup>113</sup>

While the Christian may address God as "Abba," redemption is incomplete.

The present condition, then, of the Christian in this world is one of much suffering and weakness, with a painful sense of incompleteness, tempered by a sure and certain hope. That hope is based upon the Spirit which makes him a son of God.<sup>114</sup>

This contradiction of the now and the not yet is reflected in prayer, which is the "culminating point of our inner life."<sup>115</sup> Man's weakness, his imperfection, precludes boasting in the presence of God;<sup>116</sup> the worshiper rather

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<sup>112</sup>Eduard Schweizer, "Spirit of God," Bible Key Words, III, 77, citing H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum N. T. aus Talmud und Midrash, III, 243.

<sup>113</sup>Cf. Rom. 8:15-16; I Cor. 12:3.

<sup>114</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, p. 134.

<sup>115</sup>Franz J. Leenhardt, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 229-30.

<sup>116</sup>Cf. Is. 6; Lk. 18:13.

expresses only his poverty and his dissatisfaction with himself. With "signs too deep for words,"<sup>117</sup> the Spirit intercedes for man who, left to his own, does not know how to pray.<sup>118</sup> It is the divine initiative which is stressed at this point, for the Spirit is the "manner in which the Lord of the Church is present."<sup>119</sup> There is, however, no pantheistic identification of the human and divine spirits here; the emphasis rather is on the soul as the meeting place between God and man.<sup>120</sup> The idea of the cooperation of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit is also found in Ephesians 2:18 and in Jude 20.

Paul also has one reference (Rom. 8:34) to the "intercession"<sup>121</sup> of the risen Lord who sits at the right

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<sup>117</sup>There is no reason to understand Rom 8:26-27 as an interpretation of glossolalia as does Jay, op. cit., p. 5. Cf. Greeven, op. cit., II, 805; Leenhardt, op. cit., p. 231; Watson Mills, "A Theological Interpretation of Tongues in Acts and First Corinthians" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1968), pp. 60 f.

<sup>118</sup>Cf. Robert F. Boyd, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer: An Exposition of Romans 8:26, 27," Interpretation, VIII, No. 1 (January, 1954), 35-42.

<sup>119</sup>Schweizer, op. cit., p. 83; cf. Dodd, Romans, p. 136.

<sup>120</sup>Lindsay Dewar, The Holy Spirit and Modern Thought, p. 71; Schweizer, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>121</sup>The word ἐντυγχάνω is also found in Rom 8:27; 11:2; Acts 25:24; Heb. 7:25. It means to "approach," "appeal to" or "petition" someone. Cf. Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 269.

hand of God,<sup>122</sup> a theme which is picked up later in I John and in Hebrews. The stress is not on a hostile God as opposed to a loving Christ; Paul insists that it is God who is for man (Rom. 8:31) and who gave up his Son on man's behalf (8:32). The emphasis is on God who "justifies" and Christ who "intercedes," or approaches God continually on man's behalf. The Father and the Son are not divided in their attitude toward man. The importance of this for man's prayer life lies primarily in understanding God as one who is responsive to the needs of his adopted "sons."

#### V. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN THE DEUTERO-PAULINE EPISTLES, THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES AND THE APOCALYPSE

The scattered references to prayers in the remainder of the New Testament are, with only a few possible exceptions, prayers of thanksgiving for the love and concern of readers or requests for spiritual growth on the part of new Christians.

##### Ephesians

Ephesians records the writer's prayer that God grant his readers "wisdom" and "knowledge" (1:16 ff.) and that God, through his Spirit, strengthen them in the "inner man"

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Col. 3:1; Eph. 1:19-20.

so that they might comprehend the love of Christ (3:14-19).

Ephesians 6:17-20 advises taking

the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, with all prayer and supplication praying always in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, in the opening of my mouth to make known the boldness the mystery of the gospel.<sup>123</sup>

The phrase "sword of the Spirit" must be seen in light of "praying in the Spirit." Thus, the utterance of God, the instruments of God's warfare with evil, are compared with the prayers of the Christian which are aided by the Spirit within us.<sup>124</sup> In this case, the object of such intercession was to be "the saints" and, more specifically, Paul's ministry.

### Pastoral Epistles

In the Pastoral Epistles only one passage is relevant to the understanding of intercessory prayer. In I Timothy 2:1-6, the writer urges that prayers be made "for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions."<sup>125</sup> If the section is a unity,<sup>126</sup> the issue seems to be the

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<sup>123</sup>Translation by J. A. Robinson, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, p. 130.

<sup>124</sup>Cf. ibid., pp. 135-36; Rom. 8:14, 26 f.

<sup>125</sup>Cf. Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1; I Peter 2:13-14.

<sup>126</sup>Cf. Fred D. Gealy, "I and II Timothy and Titus: Introduction and Exegesis," IB, XI, 397.

acknowledging of the secular authority in the public prayer of the Church. The positive answer to this question was partly to dispel rumors that Christians were not loyal subjects and to allow the Church to live a peaceful life (2:2).<sup>127</sup> Prayer was also to be offered for "all men," including kings, because God "desires all men to be saved" (2:4). The grounds for such prayer is the Christian understanding of one God and one Mediator<sup>128</sup> between God and man, Jesus. A universal God implies a universal salvation.<sup>129</sup>

### I Peter

The writer of First Peter says that, in the light of the imminence of the "end of all things," sound judgment and sobriety should characterize the prayers of the Church (4:7). Likewise, Christians are to be careful in their marriage relationships lest it affect their relationship to God in prayer (3:7).

Where hardening of heart is caused by lack of understanding in the highest and most delicate of all human relationship, the relationship with God expressed in prayer is subject to serious impediment. . . . At

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<sup>127</sup> J. H. Bernard, The Pastoral Epistles, p. 39.

<sup>128</sup> A term found elsewhere only in Hebrews.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Gealy, op. cit., p. 39.

the same time access to God in prayer is at once the goal and the test of human affection.<sup>130</sup>

Verses 8-12 of chapter three compile a general statement on Christian character. It employs a slightly modified quotation of Psalm 36:13-17 (Septuagint) which asserts that "the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer" (3:12).

### James

The letter of James asserts that God stands ready to grant "wisdom" to those who ask "in faith, with no doubting" (James 1:5-6). Prayer must involve the turning of the whole man to God; thus, the man who doubts lacks stability within changing circumstances (1:6) and assurance of an answer from God. He is a "double-souled" man (1:8), a man divided in his interests. The wisdom which is described here is to be contrasted with that of materialistic philosophers described in 3:13-18.<sup>131</sup>

James 4:1-12 indicates that malice, covetousness and violence had erupted in the Church,<sup>132</sup> although the voracious desires of the troublemakers had not been filled. Real

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<sup>130</sup>Edward G. Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter, p. 188.

<sup>131</sup>Cf. Bo Reicke, The Epistles of James, Peter and Jude, p. 14.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., pp. 45 ff.

satisfaction, peace and contentment were to be obtained only by prayer (4:2-3), for "man's primary need . . . is to desire the right things; i.e., the things that God will bestow upon His children if they ask Him for them."<sup>133</sup> In contrast to 1:5-6, the object of prayer here seems to be material things. The problem was that some prayed for material things only to be able to live sumptuously. Such an inordinate desire for possessions classifies them as "adulteresses" (4:4), a word which often indicates idolatry.<sup>134</sup>

A traditional problem passage is James 5:13-18 with its reference to prayer and the healing of the sick. It was to be the task of the elders to pray for the sick person and to anoint him with oil on behalf of ("in the name of") the Lord. The use of the oil may reflect the Jewish idea that olive oil is a kind of "life elixir" with healing qualities,<sup>135</sup> but the main emphasis is on the intercessory

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<sup>133</sup>R. V. G. Tasker, The General Epistle of James, p. 88.

<sup>134</sup>Reicke, op. cit., p. 46; cf. Tasker, op. cit., pp. 88-89.

<sup>135</sup>Reicke, op. cit., p. 59, cites the Apocalypse of Moses, 9; the Book of Adam and Eve, 36; and the Gospel of Nicodemus, 19, where the "tree of life" is described as flowing with healing oil. One of the traditional uses of oil is in the treating of wounds (Lk. 10:34).

prayer (5:14-15a).<sup>136</sup> The connection of sickness with sin being taken for granted,<sup>137</sup> confession is a necessary prerequisite to healing (5:15b). If confession is good for the sick, it is good for the congregation as a whole (5:16a).

Verses 17 and 18 use Elijah as an example of a "righteous" man whose prayers are particularly effective (4:16b).<sup>138</sup> The Old Testament concept of the unusual powers possessed by a righteous or holy man is evident here. The temptation to view such prayer as a form of magic is tempered by the fact that the process of prayer and healing is a joint one; both the sick man (5:13; 5:15?) and the elders (5:14) pray. If the sickness is caused by sin--a possibility modern medicine would recognize, it is significant that the patient knows that prayer is being offered for him. Indeed, he directs the content of that prayer by the confession of his sin.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup>Nothing new is advocated here--the rabbis also visited the sick and prayed for them (cf. Bab. B., 116a)--nor are other therapeutic methods excluded. J. H. Ropes, The Epistle of St. James, p. 304.

<sup>137</sup>Cf. I Kings 14:4 f.; Matt. 9:2 f.; I Cor. 11:30.

<sup>138</sup>Cf. Reicke, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>139</sup>H. D. Wright, op. cit., pp. 148 ff., believes that "the task of the elders would be to add direction rather than weight to [the sick man's] prayers."

## Hebrews

The unique contribution of the Letter to the Hebrews is the way in which it grounds prayer in the earthly obedience (4:7-10) and the heavenly intercession of Christ (7:23-25; 9:24; 10:19 ff.). As C. W. F. Smith has observed, the key word in Hebrews is προσέρχομαι, "draw near" (4:16; 7:25; 10:1; 10:22; 11:6; 12:18; 12:22); "prayer is approaching God in and through Christ."<sup>140</sup> Fear does not characterize Christian prayer, but confidence born of the fact that Christ has made, once and for all, the all-sufficient sacrifice (10:10-14).

The concept of Christ's eternal intercession<sup>141</sup> is grounded in the idea that Christ is the new High Priest who replaces the ineffective Levitical priesthood. The new High Priest, like Melchizedek, "owes his office to the immediate life energies of God,"<sup>142</sup> and not bodily descent. The oath of God (7:20 f.) guarantees the perpetual, indestructible priesthood of Christ. The result is that Christ is the "mediator and guarantor of an eternal salvation."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>C. W. F. Smith, op. cit., p. 865.

<sup>141</sup>Cf. Rom. 8:34; I Jn. 2:1.

<sup>142</sup>Johannes Schneider, The Letter to the Hebrews, p. 65; cf. Heb. 7:6.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

While the author of Hebrews tends to stress the future aspects of salvation, there is also much said about the benefits of Jesus' eternal ministry for the believer's earthly life (2:10, 14-18; 4:16; 7:25; 12:28; 13:20-31).

The important thing is that

salvation whether in its partial realization in the present or in its completed realization in the future is mediated through Jesus and is what it is because of what he is and does.<sup>144</sup>

If a modern reader has difficulty with Hebrews, it is because the author never escaped the old ritual conceptions, holding as he did to the belief that the divine originals are of the same nature as the earthly type.<sup>145</sup> The conviction that men are brought near to God in Christ finds expression in terms of priestly rituals. The universal conception of an exclusive priesthood expressed men's need of a mediator, or one who could stand nearer the presence of God than they. This idea, relieved of its grosser elements, is the way Hebrews understands the fact that through Christ men have access to God (4:16) that they could not win for themselves.<sup>146</sup> To take the image of

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<sup>144</sup>H. L. MacNeill, The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 49.

<sup>145</sup>E. F. Scott, The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Doctrine and Significance, pp. 137 ff.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., pp. 140 f. The image of the priestly mediator does speak to the depths of men. The extent to which Hebrews has "moulded the language of our prayers

Christ continually interceding for or before God literally would, by its crudeness, miss the basic intention of the writer. Christ is not a third party standing between God and man--that is a Gnostic or Arian idea--rather in him God and man meet. He is true man, and in him man is brought into the presence of God.<sup>147</sup>

### The Apocalypse

The Apocalypse of John begins with John deep in prayer ("in the Spirit") on the Lord's day and the account of the vision which he received. The martyrs pray to the Sovereign Lord to avenge their deaths, but the prayer was not immediately answered (6:9-11). With unforgettable images, the "prayers of the saints" are described as sacrificial offerings which are mingled with incense on the altar before God's throne (8:1-5). It is said that heaven was silent for half an hour before the prayers were heard.

Adoration is stressed in the Apocalypse. The multitudes of saints are pictured as continually giving thanks and praise to God and to the Lamb (e.g., Rev. 4, 5, 7),

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and hymns" is significant. "In their actual approach to God, men have been constrained to fall back on its [Hebrews'] conception of the High Priest who offered up himself and makes intercession for them in the heavenly temple."

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Stagg, New Testament Theology, pp. 72 f.

but this is not to be seen as a "mystic conception of union with God."<sup>148</sup> The Apocalypse ends with the petition, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20).<sup>149</sup>

### Jude

Jude 20 echoes the Pauline emphasis on the role of the Spirit in prayer: "But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit." Teachers of heresy were instigating disturbances. The Christian answer is prayer, love, and hope in God's purpose to grant success to the Church.<sup>150</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

### Two Problems

Before identifying the basic presuppositions which undergird the New Testament practice of intercessory prayer, there are two residual problems which must be considered. First, does the New Testament consider it legitimate to pray for material as well as spiritual blessings? Second, what is the role of faith in the act of prayer?

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<sup>148</sup>H. Trevor Hughes, Prophetic Prayer, p. 44.

<sup>149</sup>Cf. I Cor. 16:22.

<sup>150</sup>Cf. Reicke, op. cit., p. 214.

Prayer for material blessings. To the first question it may be answered that anything which is important for the believer may be the object of prayer. "External things can be important and can find a place in prayer."<sup>151</sup> While prayer for material things is secondary in the New Testament--the priority being given to spiritual benefits, "there is no strained or unnatural idealism in the teaching of Jesus."<sup>152</sup> The request for bread in the Lord's Prayer is paralleled by the report that prayers of thanksgiving are offered for bread at meals (e.g., Mark 8:6; I Cor. 11:24). Matthew 7:11 reports that the Father gives "good things" to his children,<sup>153</sup> while Mark 13:18 and parallels indicate prayer should be made for deliverance from distress at the great tribulation. Paul prays for the removal of his "thorn in the flesh" and for the chance to visit Rome and Thessalonica, and Jesus prays for deliverance from suffering and death. Prayer is associated with requests for healing,<sup>154</sup> and Jesus indicates that the

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<sup>151</sup>Greeven, op. cit., II, 804-805.

<sup>152</sup>McFadyen, op. cit., p. 129; cf. H. D. Wright, op. cit., pp. 164 ff.

<sup>153</sup>Note the spiritualizing tendency in the parallel, Lk. 11:13, where "Holy Spirit" is substituted for "good things."

<sup>154</sup>Mk. 1:44 ff.; 5:21 ff.; 7:24 ff. may represent, because of the reference to kneeling at Jesus' feet, a type of praying faith.

exorcism of the epileptic boy (Mark 9:14 ff.) can only be accomplished by prayer.

It is significant, however, that the Gospels do not record that Jesus prayed for material blessings either for himself or his disciples.<sup>155</sup> Neither he nor they were exempt from the hardships which men would normally wish to avoid.<sup>156</sup> One may surmise that the early Christians prayed for material blessing (James 5:13 ff.), but they were content to find an answer, as Paul did, in God's grace in the midst of weakness (II. Cor. 12:8 f.).

The role of faith in prayer. The second problem relates to the place of faith in the answering of prayer.<sup>157</sup> Studies in the meaning of the word πίστις<sup>158</sup> show that "faith" can mean obedience, or trust, or assent to the words of God, or hope, or intellectual belief. While the distinctively Christian understanding is that faith (πίστις

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<sup>155</sup>The prayer in Gethsemane is a possible exception.

<sup>156</sup>Cf. West, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>157</sup>Texts which relate prayer and faith are: Matt. 6:30; 8:10; 21:22 (Mk. 11:22-24); Mk. 9:23 f.; Jn. 11:20-27; James 1:5-6; 5:14-15; I Jn. 3:22-23.

<sup>158</sup>Edward D. O'Connor, Faith in the Synoptic Gospels; Rudolf Bultmann and Artur Weiser, "Faith," Bible Key Words, Vol. III; E. C. Blackman, "Faith," IDB, II, 222-34.

εἰς) involves "acceptance of the Christian kerygma,"<sup>159</sup> the concept of faith as trust is very prominent, especially in the synoptics.<sup>160</sup> Bultmann asserts that in the healing narratives, faith "denotes trust in the miraculous help of God, indeed in one's own power to perform miracles," so that πίστις is basically "faith in prayer."<sup>161</sup> This may, however, be a bit extreme. Van der Loos has questioned Bultmann at this point, saying "faith related . . . to the whole of Jesus' activities in word and deed, and not only to His miraculous power."<sup>162</sup> The Johannine usage of "faith" is more clearly that of the early Church's preaching. That is, faith is belief that Jesus is the Messiah or that he was sent by God (Jn. 11:20-27).<sup>163</sup>

It can be noted with certainty that "there is not

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<sup>159</sup>Bultmann, "Faith," pp. 68-69.

<sup>160</sup>V. Taylor, *Mark*, p. 194, says that πίστις in Mark "denotes a confident trust in Jesus and His power to help." Paul also used faith as "trust," cf. Rom. 4:17-20.

<sup>161</sup>Bultmann, "Faith," pp. 64-65. Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, pp. 79 ff., notes that the "tales" in the Synoptics deal with Jesus as a miracle-worker. The sayings about faith which occur in them (e.g., Mk. 9:23) "do not mean the faith which the missionaries preach to the Churches, but belief in the power of the miracle-worker."

<sup>162</sup>Van der Loos, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-69.

<sup>163</sup>Blackman, *op. cit.*, p. 224, notes that for John πιστεύω is similar to γινώσκω.

the slightest connection between the healing in the Gospels and . . . so-called faith-cures."<sup>164</sup> The faith of the sick has nothing to do with suggestibility. There is no causal connection between faith and healing; rather healing is described by tradition as deeds of Jesus' omnipotent compassion. On occasion, the faith in question in the healing narratives is that of a relative or friend (Mark 7:24 ff.; 2:3 ff.). Faith, then, is "the proper human attitude at the receiving end of an act of God."<sup>165</sup> Faith is not entirely passive, however, for it "precedes the act of God and actively seeks his help. . . . The sick person energetically grasps God's help, and his importunity, like prayer itself, calls forth an act of God."<sup>166</sup>

The prayer of faith does not have magic power or a coercive character. Rather it is an expression of the belief that "God has the power to bring about changes in what man regards as immutable in the ordinary course of events, since His way is the way of will and love."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup>Van der Loos, op. cit., p. 267; cf. Reginald H. Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, pp. 42 ff.

<sup>165</sup>Fuller, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., p. 43; cf. Philip Carrington, According to Mark, p. 244.

<sup>167</sup>Van der Loos, op. cit., p. 274.

### Presuppositions of Intercessory Prayer

There are four presuppositions of Jesus and the early Church which undergirded their understanding of prayer.

Old Testament heritage. First, Jesus and his followers were the heirs of Jewish belief that God is the Creator of the universe, Sovereign Lord over man, nature and history.<sup>168</sup> God's sovereignty over nature is expressed in the act of "thanksgiving" at meals, while his sovereignty over the well-being of man is presupposed in the prayers for and accounts of healing. God's lordship over history--that is, the belief that his purpose for the redemption of the world is being fulfilled in history--is the subject of Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17,<sup>169</sup> while Jesus' prayer in Luke 10:21 (par. Matt. 11:25 f.) refers to God as the "Lord of heaven and earth" whose gracious will was being worked out in the revelation through the Son.<sup>170</sup>

Just as under the old covenant the possibility of worship lay in God's Shekinah, his glorious presence with

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<sup>168</sup> Cf. Acts 4:24 ff.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. the quote from Ps. 2:1 f. in Acts 4:25-26.

<sup>170</sup> Manson, op. cit., pp. 107 ff., regards this pericope as authentic, but Creed, op. cit., p. 148, does not think it was original with Jesus.

his people,<sup>171</sup> so now the possibility for communion with God lies in the fact that the Word has become flesh and "dwelt" ( ἐσκήνωσεν ) among us (John 1:14). The implication is that Christ is the true Shekinah, the true presence of God with his people.<sup>172</sup> Man is still under God's covenant, but, in Christ, God has revealed himself far more fully than under the limitations of the old covenant.<sup>173</sup>

With God, all things are possible (Matt. 14:36), and prayer is answerable if asked in accordance with God's will (Jn. 15). God knows what man needs before he asks (Matt. 6:8), and it is to God that man is to go for wisdom (James 1:5; Lk. 6:12 ff.; Acts 1:24). Because of the nature of God, it is his will which is the primary object of prayer (Mk. 14:36; I Jn. 5:14).

God as Abba. A second presupposition--and perhaps

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<sup>171</sup>While God's abiding place--his Shekinah according to the Targums and rabbinic writings--was associated at first with physical wonders, the ark, and then the Temple in Jerusalem, there was never any doubt that the transcendent God could dwell on earth wherever he chose to do so. After the destruction of the Temple, the Shekinah was considered particularly vivid in the acts of worship, study of the Law, and in obedient living. Cf. Dale Moody, "Shekinah," IDB, IV, 317-19.

<sup>172</sup>Cf. ibid., pp. 318-19, for other references which identify Christ as the Shekinah of God.

<sup>173</sup>William Nicholls, Jacob's Ladder: The Meaning of Worship, pp. 17 ff.

the most important--is the new understanding of God as Father (Abba) taught by Jesus. It is true that the Church could view God as Father with reference to his authority and merciful tenderness,<sup>174</sup> but even more important is the fact that God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The distinctive feature of early Christian prayer is the certainty of being heard. This derives directly from faith in the fatherly love of God, and it is continually strengthened by the references of Jesus to this loving will which infinitely surpasses all earthly goodwill or readiness to help.<sup>175</sup>

Joachim Jeremias has pointed out the significance of Jesus' addressing God as "my Father" when "there is not a single instance of God being addressed as abba in Jewish prayers."<sup>176</sup> Such a use expresses a very special relationship to God on Jesus' part--a relationship characterized by trust and authority.

It is this special "sonship" which Jesus offers his followers<sup>177</sup> and which is verified by Paul in Romans 8:14 and Galatians 4:6. This intimate relationship between God and man, akin to that between a son and his father, leads to confidence that God will hear prayers and answer them

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<sup>174</sup>Jeremias, Prayers, pp. 11 ff.

<sup>175</sup>Greeven, op. cit., p. 803.

<sup>176</sup>Jeremias, Prayers, p. 62.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid., pp. 95-98, 108-12.

out of his wisdom and compassion. Men are more valuable than sparrows, and the Father's care is over all (Matt. 10:20 ff.; cf. Matt. 18:12 ff.). As Hebrews 4:15 f. illustrates, it is the revelation of a God who cares which results in confidence in the reality of prayer. Long prayers are not necessary; it is the nature of God, not our persistence, which is the ground for certainty.

The place of the Holy Spirit. A third presupposition of prayer grows out of the early Church's experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. Eric Jay has characterized as the beginning of a theology of prayer the Pauline doctrine of Christ's redemption of men from slavery to become "sons of God" (Rom. 8:14 ff.) and thus to a greater freedom of approach to God.<sup>178</sup> This new relationship in which prayer is comparable to a son's address to his father, is explained in Galatians 4:4 ff. and Romans 8:15 ff. by the fact that "the Spirit of him who is the eternal Son of God has been given to the hearts of Christians, enabling them to approach God as Father."<sup>179</sup> The result is a confident, bold, frank manner of speaking to God which is characterized by the use of the word *παρησία* ("openness," "courage," "joyousness") in relation to prayer.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>Jay, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>180</sup>Cf. Eph. 3:12; I Jn. 3:21; 5:14; Heb. 4:16; 10:19.

Not only does the Christian approach God as Abba with confidence; the initiative for prayer comes from God through the working of the Spirit, so that the incoherent groaning of man's spirit (Rom. 8:26 f.) is accepted as a prayer.<sup>181</sup> If this should be taken as a reference to glossolalia--it need not, it would not be incompatible with I Corinthians 14:2, 14, where Paul distinguishes between the instructional value of glossolalia and its value as a personal expression to God. As H. B. Swete put it,

There are times when we cannot pray in words, or pray as we ought; but our inarticulate longings for a better life are the Spirit's intercessions on our behalf, audible to God who searches all hearts, and intelligible and acceptable to Him since they are the voice of His Spirit.<sup>182</sup>

The intercession of Christ. A fourth presupposition of prayer is the conviction that the prayer of the believer is caught up in and receives strength from the prayers of the risen Christ (Rom. 8:34; cf. I Jn. 2:1; Heb. 7:25; 9:24). The intercession of Christ, God's activity on behalf of man, is the presence of the assisting Spirit writ large, for Christ as well as the Holy Spirit is

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<sup>181</sup>Cf. Boyd, op. cit., pp. 40-42; Dewar, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

<sup>182</sup>Henry B. Swete, The Holy Spirit in the New Testament, p. 221.

called a Paraclete (I Jn. 2:1).<sup>183</sup> It should also be remembered that Romans 8:1-11 twice uses Spirit and Christ interchangeably. Paul, at least, was not interested in how God, Christ, and the Spirit are related. The Spirit is simply the way Christ is present in his Church.<sup>184</sup> The heavenly intercession of Christ is definitely not to be conceived as an unbroken act of propitiation;<sup>185</sup> rather it is part of God's own continual act on behalf of mankind. "Christ is the Paraclete in heaven. The Holy Spirit is the Paraclete on earth."<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup>Cf. J. G. Tasker, "Intercession," ERE, VII, 384.

<sup>184</sup>Schweizer, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>185</sup>Tasker, loc. cit.

<sup>186</sup>Boyd, op. cit., p. 40, citing A. C. Downes, The Mission and Ministration of the Holy Spirit.

## CONCLUSION TO PART ONE

The biblical understanding of petitionary and intercessory prayer has now been examined. The issue is complex, and there is something audacious about judging so intimate a relationship as that of a man with his God from the relatively small amount of material at hand. Nevertheless, the study had to be made for the simple reason that man's understanding of prayer--as well as his understanding of the Christian faith--must always measure itself by its foundations, though this does not mean that one is bound to accept indiscriminately every concept of prayer mentioned within the pages of Scripture.

What, then, by way of summary, may be said of the biblical understanding of prayer? Five basic points seem to be most important:

First, one must honestly recognize a certain naivete' about the biblical writers. The empirical demands of modern science and the logical demands of rational philosophy had not made their inroads in the Hebrew mind. God was real--there was no question of that--and miracles happened at his behest. If God was personal, he was also holy; so it was assumed that the prayers of a righteous man (or a prophet) were more "effective" than those of a common man.

Second, for all of its naiveté, the Jewish mind did not surrender the paradoxical belief in both the transcendence and immanence of God. God was transcendent, his will was sovereign, his ways were not man's ways. With regard to prayer, this meant that God could not be manipulated or coerced; all prayers were not answered as men would have them answered. The stories of Abraham, Jesus, and Paul all contain instances where earnest prayer was refused! But God is also immanent. The world is pliable in God's hands; a false understanding of "natural law" did not keep man from believing that God could and did answer prayer when he so chose.

Third, there is in the biblical record a shift in emphasis from the material to the spiritual as the focus of petitionary prayer. While one must not accept uncritically the Wellhausen-Hegelian theory of evolving theism in Israel, it is still true that there is a considerable difference between Samuel's and Elijah's prayers for rain (I Sam. 12:17 f.; I Kings 17:1; 18:37-40) and Epaphras' prayers that his fellow Christians might be mature in the will of God (Col. 4:12). Such a shift is not universal--James 5 is reminiscent of an older tradition--but there can be no doubt of the difference between Jesus' prayer of surrender to the will of God and the crude idea that man might instruct or manipulate God. All of this does not

mean, of course, that concern for the material aspect of life was abandoned as one moved into the New Testament period. Jesus' prayer for deliverance from death and Paul's cry for release from his "thorn in the flesh" testify that the biblical understanding is opposed to any dualistic separation of the concerns of the body and the concerns of the "soul."

Fourth, the biblical writers anticipated such men as John A. T. Robinson and Paul van Buren when they insisted that prayer could not be separated from one's responsibility towards one's neighbor. Amos decried a form of worship--which included prayer, of course--which did not affect one's own personal righteousness. Paul prayed for the Church at Rome when he prayed that he might be allowed to go to them. The biblical writers would never have divorced intercession for another from one's own personal involvement with that other. It is significant that a recent study of intercessory prayer in the New Testament concludes that both Jesus and the early Church understood the answers to intercessory prayer to be channeled through the one praying.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the New Testament--especially Paul--

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<sup>1</sup>H. D. Wright, "Intercessory Prayer in the New Testament" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964).

emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in our prayers. The primary emphasis is on the help of the Spirit in man's spiritual "weakness" (Rom. 8:26 f.), but there is a sense in which one may say that all prayers are the result of God's initiative through the Spirit. In some sense, then, man's prayers of intercession are part of God's plan; they are instrumental in the well-being of those for whom prayer is offered.

PART TWO

CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Part Two is to examine the four basic ways of understanding God's relationship to the world order--insofar as this relates to the problem of petitionary and intercessory prayer--that are to be found in twentieth century Protestant writers. This is not intended to be a complete or exhaustive survey; only two or three writers will be treated in each of the categories. Others who might have been considered are mentioned in the introduction to each chapter. Beyond the fact that each must have expressed himself fairly clearly on the subject--a factor which excluded such a man as John Baillie--there is inevitably a certain arbitrariness about the selection which follows. Nor are the following chapters to be considered as an attempt to examine in detail the relationship of prayer to the entire system of thought held by each of the writers considered. The aim is more limited: what do these men--and one woman--have to say about the possibility and meaning of intercessory prayer?

Four approaches will be considered in the succeeding chapters:

- (1) There is the approach which understands man's will, as expressed in prayer, actually to effect some change in God's relationship to the material order.

(2) A second approach agrees that God retains the freedom to act within the universe but understands petitions primarily in terms of aligning man's will with God's prior and sovereign will. While God may will to have man's prayers, in effect man's desires, as expressed in prayer, are not taken into account in the ordering of the world.

(3) A third approach affirms a divine-human communion in which man's prayers effectively shape God's response, but tends to restrict God's actions within the material order to the inspired acts of men in whom God works.

(4) Finally, there is an approach which abandons any idea of communion with a transcendent deity--particularly in terms of petition or intercession--and is content to "ethicize" prayer. Prayer, according to the various representatives of this view, is redefined as humanitarian action within this world.

Because each of the writers to be considered below approaches the subject from a somewhat different standpoint, critique and evaluation will follow the consideration of each individual. There will be no summary and evaluation of each separate chapter until the "Conclusion" to Part Two which is found at the end of Chapter VI.

## CHAPTER III

### PRAYER AFFECTS GOD'S ACTIONS

In this, the first of four chapters which deal with possible alternatives regarding the relation of prayer to God's action in his world, will be treated those who make the largest claims for the power of prayer--that is, prayer is viewed as actually affecting God's effective action in nature. With regard to intercessory prayer, such a view affirms the fact that one's prayer for another man is effective apart from efforts on the part of the prayer or knowledge by the one prayed for that he had become the object of prayer. While subjective results are the legitimate byproducts of intercessory prayer, the ultimate question for the men treated in this section is whether God does anything in response to our prayers! As G. Campbell Morgan put it: "All the subjective value of prayer has grown out of conviction of an objective value."<sup>1</sup> It should be said that the two whom this writer has chosen to represent this particular position are not naive enough to think that prayer, regardless of God's will, is automatically answered. A book such as Glenn Clark's The Soul's Sincere Desire is unacceptable to them because it leaves

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<sup>1</sup>G. C. Morgan, The Practice of Prayer, p. 20.

one with an indulgent God and an over-confidence in human wisdom in prayer.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to H. H. Farmer, the Cambridge professor, and George A. Buttrick, the New York pastor--both of whom are Presbyterians--the following can be regarded as generally representative of the belief that prayer has an objective value, that God does take man's prayers into consideration: Henry Bett,<sup>3</sup> John S. Bonnell,<sup>4</sup> L. Harold DeWolf,<sup>5</sup> John Macquarrie,<sup>6</sup> Douglas V. Steere,<sup>7</sup> George S. Stewart,<sup>8</sup> and Paul Tillich.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. George A. Buttrick, Prayer, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup>The Reality of the Religious Life and Studies in Religion.

<sup>4</sup>The Practice and Power of Prayer.

<sup>5</sup>A Theology of the Living Church, pp. 355-63.

<sup>6</sup>Principles of Christian Theology, pp. 437-40. Macquarrie says that prayer takes place "in the context of Being" and thus has repercussions beyond the life of the one praying.

<sup>7</sup>Dimensions of Prayer.

<sup>8</sup>The Lower Levels of Prayer.

<sup>9</sup>Tillich might be considered in this category because of his view that "every serious prayer produces something new in terms of creaturely freedom which is taken into consideration in the whole of God's directing creativity, as is every act of man's centered self" (Systematic Theology, III, 191; cf. ibid., I, 266 f.). Tillich would not, however, wish to speak of petitionary prayer as an exercise of one's will over against God's; prayer is more of "surrender of a fragment of existence to God" (Ibid., I, 267).

## I. H. H. FARMER

H. H. Farmer, emeritus professor of divinity at Cambridge University, has been described as one who "combines the best of historic Calvinism with the best of contemporary existentialism."<sup>10</sup> Farmer's basic contention is that "God is personal, and [He] deals personally with men." This, he insists, is "at the heart of Christian experience and thought."<sup>11</sup> In this he is indebted to Martin Buber and to his old teacher, John Oman.<sup>12</sup> Believing as he does in a God who deals in a personal way with man, Farmer naturally feels misgivings about the monistic, or naturalistic, view of the universe which has characterized modern thought since Hegel.<sup>13</sup> In such thought, providence is not seen as the personal care of the Father of our Lord

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<sup>10</sup>F. C. Mallory, "The Christian Philosophy of H. H. Farmer" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1962), p. 2. Other biographical data may be found in S. S. Hill, Jr., "The Religious Thought of H. H. Farmer with Special Reference to the Doctrine of Providence" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, Duke University, 1960).

<sup>11</sup>H. H. Farmer, The World and God: A Study of Prayer, Providence and Miracle in Christian Experience, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. xi; cf. H. H. Farmer, The Servant of the Word, p. 26, and Mallory, op. cit., pp. 7 f.

<sup>13</sup>Farmer, World and God, pp. 2 ff. Farmer says (p. 4) that the "life-force" philosophies of Bergson, Morgan and Dewey are Hegelianism in modern dress.

Jesus Christ but as an ongoing process, operating through natural laws to conserve the values which have emerged. Such a naturalistic view of the universe means that prayers of petition--and "petition is the heart of prayer"<sup>14</sup>--are either eliminated or reinterpreted.<sup>15</sup>

In the face of the threat of a monistic world-view, a view which presupposes a universe governed by immutable laws, Farmer wishes to reassert the reality of the "supernatural," which is personal, over against the impersonal "natural." With regard to the question of prayer, Farmer is opposed to "the Spinozistic bias of the philosophic mind," that is, the tendency to doubt the effectual sovereignty of God within and above the natural order.<sup>16</sup>

### Presuppositions

In order to understand Farmer's defense of the validity of prayer, one must first grasp his presuppositions regarding: (1) the nature of God as personal; (2) the nature of the world order; (3) the nature of God's relationship with the world order, or the meaning of Providence.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 5 f. Farmer specifically criticizes Ritschl for making prayer a submission to the divine will and F. W. Robertson for regarding the elimination of petition as a mark of maturity.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 131; cf. Hill, op. cit., p. 240.

The nature of God. Farmer asks what would be involved in the awareness of God as personal; he finds the answer in man's awareness of others as personal beings. Two factors are found in this awareness: the awareness of another will which is potentially resistant to man's will, and the awareness of a will which is potentially cooperative.<sup>17</sup> One would expect the apprehension of God as personal to be continuous with his experience with men. This proves to be true, for God is intuitively known as both Demand and Final Succour. The religious man is aware of a peculiar resistance set up within the sphere of his own values. He is intuitively aware that this value-resistance is the will of the ultimate purpose at the heart of all being,<sup>18</sup> and it is known as a personal will. On the other hand, God is known as Final Succour in that the demands of God "are apprehended as pointing the way to the highest self-realization, the final security of man."<sup>19</sup> Man intuitively knows this experience of Demand and

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<sup>17</sup> Farmer, World and God, pp. 22-23. It is obvious that the act of prayer assumes the above conditions, for it is conscious of another will which is beyond its control, yet potentially cooperative with it.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

Succour as the approach of the ultimate personal God to the soul.<sup>20</sup>

The nature of the world order. Farmer is obviously sympathetic with Hebrew thought in his rejection of dualism and, especially, of monism as valid philosophies of nature. Any view which does away with the "triadic relationship of God, man and world" eventually depersonalizes man's relationship with God.<sup>21</sup> A genuine personal relationship between God and man must be spontaneous and free of force.<sup>22</sup> This requires a world which stands over against both God and man, a sphere in which their wills may meet.<sup>23</sup> To preserve man's freedom, God veils his glory behind "symbols" so that the world and society become God's "intrinsic" symbols, God's media of communication with man.<sup>24</sup>

Science and the Christian faith share certain

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<sup>20</sup>This intuitive knowledge belongs to man's "synthetic" apprehension of the world as opposed to the "analytic" way of knowing (Ibid., pp. 32 ff.). Synthesizing activity is not a matter of volition, but is part of man's awareness of the significance of a situation for his own life. The intuitive awareness of God is, then, related to "the deepest interest of the human organism, the interest which it has in fulfilling itself, in becoming that which . . . it is intended to be" (Ibid., p. 39).

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 68, 76.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 70 ff. An "intrinsic" symbol is organically related to the wider reality which it represents.

presuppositions about the world: it is real, rational, and regular.<sup>25</sup> But this does not indicate a form of determinism, for the world is both regular and "plastic" enough to be changed. Man, by the exercise of his will, can certainly shape the world; it is unscientific to eliminate categorically the idea of God's personal initiative in events.<sup>26</sup> While the scientist may legitimately examine physical phenomena, he cannot investigate the "noumenal" world which is the ultimate source of nature.<sup>27</sup> The scientist may examine immediate causation, but meaning and final causation may not be so examined. Farmer borrows the image of a man examining the threads on the underside of an embroidery--the "what" may be described, but the "why" is a mystery.<sup>28</sup>

The world has a subjective side which is just as real as the objective side. An analytic understanding of the objective side only is merely a partial truth. Science is limited by the fact that events are studied post eventum when they have passed from the indeterminate

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. Mallory, op. cit., pp. 107 ff., for an extended treatment of these presuppositions. Also cf. H. Farmer, Towards Belief in God, pp. 20 ff.

<sup>26</sup>Farmer, The World and God, pp. 146 ff.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 153-54.

present to the determinate past.<sup>29</sup> It does not logically follow that the ability to explain past (fixed) events enables one to prove or disprove the role of God in these events.<sup>30</sup>

The meaning of providence. Defining providence as "a confidence that man's personal life is the concern of a wisdom and power higher than his own," Farmer insists that to deny this providence is to deny the Christian faith.<sup>31</sup> The Christian conviction of a divine providence is an "intuitive certitude" stemming from the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Faith in providence is not to be had by empirical observation or rational reflection; it is a certainty resulting from personal encounter.<sup>32</sup>

The Christian understanding of providence is perfectly compatible with the modern scientific understanding of natural "law" as probabilities which are expressed as statistical averages. "Laws" are descriptive, but not

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Chapter XII in Towards Belief in God, where Farmer uses the illustration of a man throwing a stone to point out that science has to do with the mechanics of throwing the stone, not the decision to throw it.

<sup>31</sup>Farmer, World and God, pp. 92, 230.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 231 f.

binding.<sup>33</sup> To be sure, there are regularities on which man relies, but these are "the habits and routines of co-operative behavior which the constituent monads in their ceaseless activity have so far established."<sup>34</sup>

The mention of "monads" necessitates an examination of Farmer's "pluralistic" hypothesis--based on the monadology of Leibniz--as a possible explanation of the regularity and freedom in the world.<sup>35</sup> Having rejected the monistic idea that nature is the "direct expression of the continuous, creative activity of the divine will," Farmer suggests that nature may be regarded as "an infinite number of entities of a psychical kind in continuous interplay with one another."<sup>36</sup> These monads, or independent "creative entities,"<sup>37</sup> develop habits which are manifest in regular behavior, yet each one has its own degree of freedom and spontaneity which accounts for individual

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 154 f.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>35</sup>Farmer insists that his is simply a suggestion of one possible way that "religious insight and the requirement of science might be harmonised," thus releasing men from inhibitions which they might have about regarding God as personal (Ibid., pp. 158-59).

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 170-71.

<sup>37</sup>The understanding of God as the ultimate Creator of the world is protected by terming these entities "created creators" (Ibid., p. 175. Emphasis mine.).

differences and contingency in nature.<sup>38</sup> All these creative entities, from the highest (man) to the lowest, are "fundamentally mental," and all exist in a continuous relationship with God--a relationship of neither mechanical fixity nor divine manipulation, but of cooperation.<sup>39</sup>

God's "problem" is to "achieve His own purpose . . . in a way that does not negate the system."<sup>40</sup> This means that his control is limited by the routines established in the past. Such control as God exercises may be on two levels. With sub-personal entities, God may act through "a rapport which uses the routines of their activity in relation to a given situation." On the personal level, the direction must take man's will into account; thus, God is dependent upon the cooperation of the will of man for the realization of his will.<sup>41</sup>

This, then, is the under, invisible, ontal side of nature and history--the living, creative will of God in continuous rapport with a system of living, creative entities, and waiting, in the case of man, for the personal cooperation of a will which has been given a peculiarly exalted status of independence.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Mallory, op. cit., p. 121. The higher the entity in the evolutionary scale, the more freedom it has to be cooperative or not.

<sup>40</sup>Farmer, World and God, p. 175.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

When this "creative present" becomes the past and is thus fixed, man perceives with his senses the "outward, or phenomenal side" of nature.<sup>43</sup> Prayer, however, takes place in the "creative present," the inner side of events.

[Prayer] is a relation of the will of man to the will of God, and, through the will of God, to all the living creativeness of nature. At its highest it is the throwing of the whole personality into the creativeness of God.<sup>44</sup>

Miracles as well as answers to prayer do not involve a breaking of a rigid natural law; they involve a reshaping of nature from the inside.<sup>45</sup> The answer to the problem of how an event can be the result of both divine will and determined causes is found in the awareness that back of the phenomenal world there is a will which enters into relation with other wills.

Just as man brings about effects in nature which would not otherwise happen by redirecting its routines in relation with one another, so does God, except that God acts from the inside . . . by inner rapport [with the ultimate entities which constitute the inner creative, present reality of the natural order].<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 176-77.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>45</sup>The word "miracle" is reserved for an event in which God is apprehended as Final Succour (Ibid., pp. 116-18). Miracle is thus a religious category; it is not subject to proof. Cf. Hill, op. cit., pp. 235 f., for a discussion of the way Farmer has balanced subjective and objective elements in the category of miracles.

<sup>46</sup>Farmer, World and God, p. 178.

### The Meaning of Prayer

Having laid the groundwork for what he believes is a valid belief in the providence of God and the nature of God as personal, Farmer asserts the significance of prayer as "the answering activity of man, as self-conscious personality, towards God"; prayer is the response which is evoked by the personal self-revelation of God.<sup>47</sup> The fact that petitionary prayer, which is at the heart of prayer, "has no meaning except as directed to a personal will" illustrates perfectly the fact that all prayer is basically a confrontation of personal wills. Even though this emphasis on the personal is common to all prayer, petition is the most severely criticized of all aspects of man's communion with God.<sup>48</sup>

There are two major motives which result in objections to petitionary prayer. The first of these, the desire to do justice to the demands of modern science, is answered by Farmer's conception of the world in terms of "contingent pluralism." Prayer, supposes Farmer, takes place in the "creative present" when the relationships between "creative entities" and God are still flexible. Science has no basis upon which to claim that this is not so. It should be remembered, though, that Farmer does

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

not base his belief in the efficacy of prayer on such a theory; it is merely an attempt to show that it is possible to reconcile the claims of science and the convictions of faith. It is the latter which is Farmer's starting point.

The other motive behind the rejections of petitionary prayer is religious. Petitionary prayer, it is claimed, is childish, superfluous, selfish, harmful to the moral fiber and betrays a lack of trust.<sup>49</sup> While there is some basis for these charges, the indispensability of petition is seen in the fact that it is an expression of the will, and it is in the will that awareness of ourselves and others (including God) as persons is centered. Without the expression of his will, man is less than personal.<sup>50</sup> Petition is therefore bound up with the necessity that man find true maturity by harmonizing his will with God's; it is indispensable in the realization of the divine purpose that men learn to cooperate with God in personal relationship.<sup>51</sup>

Against the objection that it is superfluous to petition a God who already seeks our good, it is answered that God may have purposed such prayer because of the personal nature of the good he seeks for man. Through

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-33.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 134-36.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 137 f.

cooperation with God, "the soul grows in stature as a son of God."<sup>52</sup> To the objection that it is presumptuous to seek to influence the divine will, Farmer replies that we must not confuse our own egotistic will-power with God's gracious willingness to take man's will into account.<sup>53</sup> If it is claimed that petitionary prayer tends to become eudaemonistic, asking God to serve our purposes, Farmer insists that this is proper--in prayer we do meet God as Final Succour--as long as the awareness of God's absolute demands are also present.<sup>54</sup>

The protest that petitionary prayer often becomes a substitute for man's own endeavor is true only if the sense of God as Demand is divorced from the sense of God as Succour. Furthermore, it is the petitionless man who, having no confidence in the responsiveness of ultimate reality to his life's work, tends to fall into despair and inaction.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the claim that petition betrays a lack of trust is simply not true. Actually, the expression of our petitions is a sign of our trust in God. To eliminate petition and pray only with the attitude of acceptance

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 138-39.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 139 ff. Farmer point out that mystical prayer can be just as egotistic, through not in so obvious a way, as prayer for the things of this world.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 141-42.

requires not a personal Father, but only an "impersonal cosmic order" which may be good, but is not personal.<sup>56</sup>

### Critique

H. H. Farmer stands firm in insisting upon the necessity and effectiveness of petitionary and, by implication, intercessory prayer. Although he does not refer to intercessory prayer by name, he does discuss most of the problems specifically relating to intercessory prayer. In particular, his emphasis that God's rapport with the "creative entities" at the inner-side of the world order must respect their freedom bears upon the problem unique to intercessory prayer--that is, the freedom of men for whom prayer is offered. He shows good judgment by not trying to base his belief in prayer on demonstrable cases of "answered" prayer, but in man's own experience of the personal God. The reality of prayer, says Farmer, is not subject to the scrutiny of science.

If God, when man enters into a right type of prayer-relationship with Himself, initiates events through the rapport which He has with all His creatures, science will still be able to give an account of such events in its own way, so soon as they have become accomplished fact.<sup>57</sup>

Farmer's hypothesis that the world is composed of "creative entities" which cooperate with God in the creative

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 142 f.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

present--while just an hypothesis--is an interesting attempt to acknowledge regularity in the process and yet see the world as pliable to the will of both God and man. There is some similarity between this position and the creative role of the Holy Spirit within the universe as it is understood by Eric Rust. Rejecting any idea of a totally determined universe, Rust sees the activity of the Spirit as giving

play to contingent elements and rival natural systems while exercising over them a control which finds expression in the orderliness of nature and the nisus of the process of evolution.<sup>58</sup>

Farmer's use of Karl Heim's "dimensional" distinctions in relation to providence is helpful. Using the well-known illustration of spatial dimensions, he suggests the paradox that

all events . . . lie within the providential ordering of God, yet without ceasing to be the result of intramundane activities. . . . There is the dimension of the temporal, . . . and there is the dimension of the eternal and divine, and every event in the former lies also in the latter.<sup>59</sup>

Farmer is most stimulating in insisting that value is found in personality and that prayer is intricately

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<sup>58</sup>Eric C. Rust, "The Holy Spirit, Nature and Man," The Review and Expositor, LXIII (Spring, 1966), 174. Cf. Eric C. Rust, Science and Faith: Towards a Theological Understanding of Nature, pp. 182-98, 279-87.

<sup>59</sup>Farmer, World and God, p. 104.

bound up with belief in a personal God. In so doing he provides an effective counter-attack to men such as Kant, Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Herrmann who rule out the element of petition.<sup>60</sup>

Farmer has, of course, been criticized at certain points. His intuitive experience of the personal has been questioned,<sup>61</sup> as well as his tendency to make, as a theologian, "pseudo-scientific statements about what actually goes on in the world."<sup>62</sup> The unsympathetic scientist may ask what is the status of Farmer's talk about rapport between God and the creative entities at the inner side of the natural order. Perhaps Farmer needs to be even more explicit that this is an hypothesis, not a statement of fact! Despite these criticisms, Farmer's contribution to the subject of prayer and providence is considerable--one that has not had sufficient recognition.

## II. GEORGE A. BUTTRICK

This writer turns now from a Cambridge professor to

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<sup>60</sup>Cf. Hill, op. cit., pp. 240-43.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. F. R. Tennant, "Review of The World and God," Mind, XLV (April, 1936), 241-46.

<sup>62</sup>J. S. Habgood, "The Uneasy Truce between Science and Theology," Soundings: Essays concerning Christian Understanding, A. R. Vidler, editor, p. 25.

an American pastor in the survey of those who have come to the defense of the effectual working of intercessory prayer. Though George Buttrick's books are written in a rather popular style, his wide reading and his solid reputation in the scholarly world merit his consideration on the subject of prayer, a theme which he treated most extensively in 1942 in a book entitled Prayer.<sup>63</sup>

### Presuppositions

Although Buttrick has not expressed himself in a systematic fashion, his writings do betray certain philosophical and theological presuppositions. Though this brief study is not primarily aimed at evaluating Buttrick's apologetic stance, some points should be made in order to get in focus his view of prayer.

Buttrick is essentially experiential in his epistemology. God is known in the experiences of Beauty, Truth,

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<sup>63</sup> After twenty-seven years as pastor of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, Buttrick continued a life-long interest in apologetics by serving as Preacher to the University and Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard University. His sermons to students weighing the meaninglessness of the modern world with the alternatives of the Christian faith appear in Sermons Preached in a University Church. The same apologetic note may be found in his first book, The Christian Fact and Modern Doubt: A Preface to a Restatement of Christian Faith, and in later works such as Christ and History and God, Pain and Evil.

Compassion and Sense of Right,<sup>64</sup> but supremely in the experience of man with Jesus Christ.<sup>65</sup> This being the case, it is faith, and not reason, which is the way to truth. "Faith plants the flag. Then reason subdues and organizes the new land which faith has won."<sup>66</sup> Faith is not a product of a logical demonstration, but "an invincible surmise" which affects the whole man--mind, emotion and will.<sup>67</sup> One must begin with faith in God, not science or logic. God, not reason, is the main axiom which makes life possible.<sup>68</sup>

This experiential starting point means that Buttrick will not define prayer as being "reasonable," for an element of mystery will remain. The Mystery will be known, however, as a gracious Mystery and thus worthy of worship.<sup>69</sup> As Buttrick puts it:

The only proof of prayer is--prayer. We can no more prove prayer by argument than we can prove swimming by diagrams on shore. We must pray.<sup>70</sup>

A second presupposition which undergirds Buttrick's

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<sup>64</sup>Buttrick, The Christian Fact, pp. 79 ff.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 140 f.      <sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 110, 77.      <sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>69</sup>George Buttrick, Prayer, p. 15; cf. Buttrick, Sermons Preached in a University Church, pp. 134, 136.

<sup>70</sup>Buttrick, Prayer, p. 154.

belief in the power of prayer is his rejection of two threats to personalistic theism: naive humanism and mechanistic materialism. The humanists' charge that God is a fictional creation, an escape from the realities of this world, is inadequate because it does not take into account the Christian faith at its highest and best. While the psychologists may properly explain "low forms" of religious faith, the "escape" theory of religion does not account for a Cross.<sup>71</sup> The effect of Buttrick's rejection of humanism is seen in his arguments against what he calls "defective theories of prayer" which deny prayer as a communion with the divine. The suggestions that prayer is simply a refined animistic fear, a personalization of the race or its mores, mere autosuggestion, or "wishful thinking" are all rejected as not being fair to the entire experience of prayer.<sup>72</sup>

Rather than the reaction of primeval fear, prayer is better described as man's reaction to the mysterium tremendum.<sup>73</sup> The theory that prayer is related to society and its values falls apart when it is realized that prayer

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<sup>71</sup> Buttrick, The Christian Fact, pp. 71-73.

<sup>72</sup> Buttrick, Prayer, pp. 43-53.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

results in the criticism of society.<sup>74</sup> Prayer cannot be mere autosuggestion, for even a "healthy lie" is renounced sooner or later; furthermore, autosuggestion, with no factual foundation, is chaotic, while true prayer is integrative.<sup>75</sup> The argument that prayer is mere "wishful thinking" or projection is subject to the same critique as any solipsist theory.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, however, it is admitted that the answer to false understandings of prayer does not lie at the rational level, but in the experience of prayer with its "certitude" of communion with God.<sup>77</sup>

Even more important--as far as the subject of prayer is concerned--is Buttrick's rejection of mechanistic materialism. Buttrick views with alarm the belief that the universe is a closed system governed by "natural law," for such a universe would have no place for God. He is therefore anxious to point out that "natural laws" are not independent realities but the mind's projection of Nature's regularity.<sup>78</sup> Against the dogmatic assertions of science, Buttrick affirms a world not of fixed law but of

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., pp. 47 f.; cf. Buttrick, The Christian Fact, pp. 199-201.

<sup>75</sup>Buttrick, Prayer, pp. 49-50.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., pp. 52-53.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>78</sup>Buttrick, The Christian Fact, pp. 25 ff.; cf. Buttrick, God, Pain and Evil, pp. 46-48.

"spontaneity and surprise within a faithfulness."<sup>79</sup> If human personality can use "natural law" to change the course of events, the personality of God cannot be less free.<sup>80</sup>

The Christian faith confesses a holy and loving Will at the heart of the world order. By analogy with human personality, we assert that this Will is both fixed and fluid. The regularity of nature may be regarded as "the fidelities of God's Spirit," while the fluidity of nature is the result of God's action.

There are fixities of faithfulness in God's nature; science calls them "law." But there are surprises in God's nature by which "he sets in at single points": religion calls them His very word and deed.<sup>81</sup>

It is God's faithfulness which sets certain limits to the power of petition--limits which we ascribe falsely to "natural law."

This leads to the third presupposition of Buttrick's

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<sup>79</sup>Buttrick, Prayer, p. 294. Buttrick says that the scientific world view is limited because it is concerned only with externals; it is analytical rather than synthetic and has forgotten that "the whole is more and other than the sum of its parts" (Ibid., p. 86). Cf. Buttrick, The Christian Fact, pp. 201-206.

<sup>80</sup>This does not mean that God is a mechanic who "manipulates" nature's laws in order to achieve his goal; this would leave God at the mercy of his world (Buttrick, Prayer, p. 84). Buttrick would prefer to describe the "laws" of nature as direct expressions of God's will.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

theology of prayer: his personalistic idealism. God, who is the ultimate reality, is regarded as personal, personal in a far more complete way than the personhood of man.<sup>82</sup>

Like Jesus, man "assumes" the personality of God, and sincere prayer is based upon that assumption.<sup>83</sup> Man does not prove God exists; he assumes God and then justifies his faith by argument.<sup>84</sup> In like manner, the experience of communion with a personal God is a primary assumption; the rationalizing of such prayer is secondary.

A fourth presupposition involves the centrality of Jesus Christ as the supreme example of a man at prayer. While the universality of prayer is an important witness to the reality of communion between God and man, "it is of even greater moment to remember that Jesus prayed."<sup>85</sup> The Gospels testify to the importance of prayer in the life of Jesus--a practice which cannot be separated from the total masterful life which he led. The skeptic who wishes only to admire Christ has a problem; how is it possible to consider Christ apart from his prayer-life?<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Buttrick, The Christian Fact, pp. 87 ff., and Prayer, p. 63.

<sup>83</sup>Buttrick, Prayer, pp. 58-60.      <sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>85</sup>Buttrick, The Christian Fact, p. 193; Buttrick, Sermons Preached in a University Church, pp. 136 ff.

<sup>86</sup>Buttrick, The Christian Fact, pp. 193-94.

Jesus' assumptions in prayer, assumptions which modern man finds too simple, were: "man is free, God lives, and the world is a place for their comradeship."<sup>87</sup> Jesus assumed that a personal God meets man within a world that is a paradox of law and liberty, a world of both fixity and change. Again, Jesus taught that prayer was to be characterized by faith in God, by realistic involvement in work, thought and service, and by persistence.<sup>88</sup> It is Jesus' example which is crucial for Buttrick. It is Jesus' "faith in prayer" which "cannot be false" and is, therefore, the standard by which all prayer must be judged.<sup>89</sup>

#### Petitionary and Intercessory Prayer

Petitionary prayer, which is defined as "prayer which asks God to change things,"<sup>90</sup> is an inevitable act which is encouraged by the words of Christ and which is not ruled out by a shallow view of psychology or "natural law."<sup>91</sup> Petition springs out of extremity when man's finitude entreats the infinite God.

The "problem of petitionary prayer" is that most petitions are not answered--at least in the terms that are

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<sup>87</sup>Buttrick, Prayer, p. 55; cf. Buttrick, God, Pain and Evil, p. 102.

<sup>88</sup>Buttrick, Prayer, pp. 31-34.      <sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 70.      <sup>91</sup>Ibid., pp. 70-74.

asked. All prayers are not fulfilled, nor does Jesus give unconditional assurances that all petitions will be granted as man wishes.<sup>92</sup> The Gospel of John (14:14; 15:7) mentions the conditions of asking "in my name" and abiding "in me." At the same time many people are convinced that their cries of petition have been answered when they could not help themselves in time of crisis.<sup>93</sup> Even the scientist may not be true to his principles and dismiss so universal a testimony.

Buttrick insists that this paradox of assent and refusal is just what one would expect out of a personal relationship in which the one known is both like us and unlike us, both for us and against us, both as demand and as succour.<sup>94</sup> The reasons why some prayers are not answered are shrouded in mystery, but without that mystery, God would not be God and man would not be man.<sup>95</sup> His ways are higher than man's ways, thus some petitions are not

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-80.

<sup>93</sup> "The conviction is an instant thing. It does not come by deduction. It is primal--like an immediate recognition" (Ibid., p. 83).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 63, 83. Buttrick acknowledges his indebtedness to H. H. Farmer's understanding of the nature of God's personal relationships with men (Ibid., p. 63).

<sup>95</sup> Buttrick, God, Pain and Evil, p. 189.

answered. But some petitions are answered, and in that answering man knows God as Mercy, Gladness, Healing and Life.<sup>96</sup>

Granting that God is not determined in his actions by the rules of "natural law" and acknowledging, at the same time, that all prayers are not answered--for reasons known only to God, Buttrick raises the more specific question of intercessory prayer.<sup>97</sup> It is readily agreed that intercessory prayer benefits the one praying--he is made more noble, his compassion is deepened--but the real issue is: "Has intercession any grace beyond the intercessor's reach?"<sup>98</sup> Buttrick adduces five basic arguments to support his case that prayer on behalf of other folk is valid.

First, there is the prime fact that Jesus practiced intercessory prayer. "Whatever our doubts, he is on the side of faith."<sup>99</sup> Second, there is the universality of the practice of intercessory prayer which seems to support the fact that it corresponds to some reality.<sup>100</sup>

A third justification for belief in intercessory prayer is its purity of motive. Unlike most human motives, compassionate prayer for others is nearly selfless. It

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<sup>96</sup>Buttrick, Prayer, p. 83.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., pp. 96-112.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-102.

would be a grotesque mockery if the world were so constituted that it defeated man at the very point where life is found at its purest and noblest.<sup>101</sup>

A fourth confirmation of intercessory prayer, says Buttrick, is the corporate aspect of human life. Man is both an individual and a social being; indeed, he becomes aware of his individuality only as he confronts other wills.<sup>102</sup> The problems of the world are every man's problems; life by its very nature has its social bonds; so it is safe to assume that prayer cannot be limited to the individual. Thus, we see that "intercession accords well with the pattern of man's life."<sup>103</sup> As Paul put it, we are "members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25), and the common nature of our life demands intercession.<sup>104</sup> Just as man is dependent upon the thought and toil of others, it is not unreasonable to suppose that we are dependent on another's prayer.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 97; cf. Buttrick, The Christian Fact, pp. 206 f.

<sup>103</sup>Buttrick, Prayer, p. 99.      <sup>104</sup>Ibid., pp. 102 f.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 103. There is no question of disregarding the freedom of man, of making prayer a coercion. On the other hand, complete individual freedom, freedom from any outside influence or act done on our behalf, is a myth. Man has an "individual freedom within the corporate bond, the corporate bond likewise being caught up into the life of God" (Ibid., p. 103).

Finally, the reasonableness of belief that some intercessions are answered derives from the "conviction" of truth-seeking men that their intercessions have been answered positively and the corresponding conviction of others that they have been blessed by such intercession. Of course, such answers to prayer could be ascribed to coincidence, for they cannot be proved any more than God can be proved. Such knowledge is intuitive and direct, and even when the prayer seems to the observer to be unanswered, the man of faith believes that a "new situation" has been created even if it is a changed heart rather than changed circumstances.<sup>106</sup>

Buttrick warns that man may not know how intercessory prayer affects another's life. He may not know how God is mediated to other men; it is enough to know the reality of such intercession. For this reason, Buttrick is reluctant to use the fact of mental telepathy as an ally of intercession. Thought transference may involve evil as well as good thoughts. Thus prayer must always be to God, for even the highest and best in man cannot ultimately provide salvation.<sup>107</sup> Buttrick does offer a "parable" of the way

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., pp. 107-109. The tendency to interpret prayer in terms of mental telepathy is illustrated in Frank C. Laubach, Prayer, The Mightiest Force in the

intercession operates. Using the analogy of a person with pneumonia who receives an injection in a healthy part of his body, his arm, Buttrick suggests that when a healthy "member"--a man disciplined in motive and deed--is offered to God, "He grants some new injection of His spirit, and . . . health spreads by the hidden channels of our common life to attack and conquer the areas of disease."<sup>108</sup>

Still, says Buttrick, our prayers are necessary for our neighbor's good. If it is asked why God does not give his good gifts anyway, why he waits upon our prayers as well as our toil and thought, Buttrick replies that such a world is consistent with God's intention for man as members of the Kingdom of God.

Apparently there are some gifts which God chooses to give through love's labor and planning--and prayer. God is intent upon the growth of . . . comradeship. He has so ordered our days that we live in mutual reliance. He yearns to see "the Beloved Community" fulfilled on earth. Therefore He has made us one life.<sup>109</sup>

While it is true that God has ordained that man

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World, and Leslie Weatherhead, Psychology, Religion and Healing, pp. 238-47.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., pp. 108-109. Buttrick's parable would be better suited to the "subjective" view of prayer which will be considered in Chapter V. The "parable" emphasizes the healthy arm (the one praying?) which is the channel for getting health-giving serum (God's help?) to a diseased lung (the object of intercessory prayer?).

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

cooperate with God--in labor as well as prayer, realism dictates that the Christian recognize the limits of petition and intercession. He may not regard prayer as a substitute for either disciplined labor or thought. Nor may he regard prayer as a means of either blessing or canceling his own wrongdoing, though prayer may certainly be a means of redeeming his errors.<sup>110</sup> The power of prayer is also limited by the nature of God's creation, though the line between circumstances which are open and those which are fixed is difficult to draw.<sup>111</sup> Care must be taken not to bury God in his own "laws," for both the fixities and variabilities of earth serve God's purpose for human growth. Buttrick offers the observation:

The greater the apparent constancy in nature, the less the power of petitionary prayer: we cannot change the tides by praying. The greater the apparent variability and flexibility, the more instant our prayers: we shall continue to pray about the weather and about physical health.<sup>112</sup>

There is a constancy and faithfulness in the world order necessary for man's life and freedom. At the same time, the faithfulness of nature is overlaid by an area of

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-23.

<sup>111</sup>A man would not pray for a new hand to grow where one had been amputated, but he would pray for someone sick with typhoid fever. Other cases may not be so clear-cut (Ibid., p. 114).

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., pp. 114-15.

free activity where man cooperates with God in thought, labor and prayer.<sup>113</sup> The ultimate limitation on prayer, the will of God, is not a fetter but a freedom--the freedom of a destiny God has for men. Within this will God has allowed room for man's own freedom; without that freedom man is no more than a robot.

### Critique

George Buttrick's book, Prayer, is a well-written and impassioned plea for a return to a life of prayer as the only way in which a world torn by World War II could return to sanity. It is only in prayer, he insists, that man may draw upon wisdom and direction of the divine Mind which alone is capable of saving man from the foolishness of his own self-sufficiency.<sup>114</sup>

In his presentation, Buttrick has been content to base his convictions about the reality of prayer not on rational arguments, but the authority of the biblical portrait of Jesus as a man of prayer. This portrait, when added to his own experience of prayer, becomes the justification for faith in the reality of prayer even when doubts are raised by unanswered prayer. Though this writer will not attempt to document such a claim, there is ample

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-10, 15-23.

reason for saying that Buttrick's view of prayer is determined more by the biblical testimony than any other one thing. Buttrick is, first and foremost, a preacher of the Word!

When this has been said, however, it must also be pointed out that Buttrick's strong affirmation that intercessory prayer is effective outside of man's participation is weakened somewhat by his emphasis on the relation of prayer to the personality.<sup>115</sup> As Buttrick admits, prayer has to do more with the "mind" side of events than the "body" side.<sup>116</sup> Prayer has more to do with the "situation," the personality, the mental and spiritual condition, of the one praying than anything else. This is true even though--as has been seen--God's objective action in the world order as a result of prayer is affirmed.

Buttrick's case is also weakened by his observation that the power of petitionary prayer is lessened as the "constancy" of nature increases.<sup>117</sup> While the distinction between fixed and flexible situations is valid, Buttrick seems to prejudice his case for a God responsive to prayers

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<sup>115</sup>Part Three of Prayer, entitled "Prayer and Personality," is some forty pages longer than Part Two, "Prayer and the World," only part of which has to do with God's action in the material order.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., pp. 114 f.

when certain limits--limits of natural law?--are placed on God. This is an ironic turn for one whose polemic is directed largely towards those who accept "natural law" in an uncritical manner.

Finally, one must ask whether Buttrick has given a valid defense of petitionary and intercessory prayer simply by refuting the fixity of "natural law" and affirming a universe which is flexible and spontaneous as well as regular, a universe where the dictates of communal living require mutual support in prayer as well as in thought and work. Many would agree that God is free to act in a world of his own creation, and all would agree that men depend upon one another in the areas of toil and thought. It is not so obvious, however, that we are dependent upon others' prayers. The former is an observable phenomenon, the latter is a statement of faith--not an argument which verifies prayer.<sup>118</sup>

In like manner, we must ask whether the assertion that God is free to act in the world must mean, in fact, that he does so at the request of man. Buttrick has not dealt adequately with the problems which his view of prayer

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Whether men affect one another by their prayers is the question. A statement to that effect may not logically be adduced as evidence for itself.

raises concerning the goodness and wisdom of God.<sup>119</sup> This is not to judge Buttrick as right or wrong at this point; it is simply to point out that he has not dealt with the issue.

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<sup>119</sup>The brief treatment of this question in The Christian Fact (p. 208) does not come to grips with the problem at all. Cf. John Knox, "Review of Prayer," The Journal of Religion, XXII, No. 2 (April, 1942), 206.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRAYER ALIGNS THE ONE PRAYING WITH THE WILL OF GOD

In addition to those who affirm that God actually is affected and, in some way, conditioned by man's prayers and intercessions, there are writers who hold to God's freedom to act within his own created order, but who couple this assertion with a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God. God is free to act, but God's freedom means that He is also free of man.

For men whose focus is on God's sovereign will, petition and intercession become an effort to discover the will of God and then pray according to the will of God. In effect, man's volition becomes a rubber stamp of the prior--and determining--will of the sovereign Lord. Some writers--Barth, for example--would deny that the sovereignty of God affects what they affirm as the freedom of man to pray and be heard by God. They would desire to hold the prayer-hearing God and the sovereign God in tension. But, as will be seen, those who are the spiritual descendants of Calvin have a difficult time achieving such a balance.

Two men will be considered in this chapter: John R. Rice and Karl Barth. Other writers who are also in this

category are: Gustaf Aulen,<sup>1</sup> E. W. Bauman,<sup>2</sup> Emil Brunner,<sup>3</sup> W. O. Carver,<sup>4</sup> W. T. Conner,<sup>5</sup> P. T. Forsyth,<sup>6</sup> Daniel Jenkins,<sup>7</sup> and Olive Wyon.<sup>8</sup>

#### I. JOHN R. RICE

John R. Rice is a well-known American evangelist and the editor of The Sword of the Lord, a Fundamentalist-oriented magazine. He is chosen as a representative theologian of the Fundamentalist wing of Protestantism because of his influential position and because he has defended his understanding of prayer in his full-length book, Prayer-- Asking and Receiving.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Faith of the Christian Church, pp. 355-61.

<sup>2</sup>Intercessory Prayer.

<sup>3</sup>The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation, Dogmatics: Vol. III, 324-35.

<sup>4</sup>Thou When Thou Prayest.

<sup>5</sup>The Epistles of John, pp. 126 ff. But cf. The Gospel of Redemption, pp. 236 ff., where a distinction is made between changing God's ultimate will and God's executive volition.

<sup>6</sup>The Soul of Prayer.

<sup>7</sup>Prayer and the Service of God.

<sup>8</sup>The School of Prayer.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. also John R. Rice, Healing in Answer to Prayer; John R. Rice and C. A. Smith, A Discussion on Miracles and Divine Healing between Dr. John R. Rice and Elder C. A. Smith.

## Presuppositions

John R. Rice's theology of intercessory prayer is influenced from two directions. First, Rice's basic presupposition is the literal infallibility of the Bible. Rice is an unashamed biblicist; he admits that his book, Prayer--Asking and Receiving, is "written on the simple basis that there is a God Who has revealed His will in the Bible, an infallible book."<sup>10</sup> An unquestioning acceptance of this fact leads Rice to believe in a personal God for whom nature is flexible. "Miracles" are absolutely essential to the orthodox Christian faith,<sup>11</sup> though "miracle" is not defined by Rice in terms of the interruption of "natural law." The unending miracle of creation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are regarded as miraculous just as much as a unique healing miracle.<sup>12</sup> The age of miracles did not cease with the completion of the canon.

A second foundation of Rice's position is experiential. Rice claims to have known miraculous answers to prayer, and he cites works which claim the same thing.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>John R. Rice, Prayer--Asking and Receiving, p. 11. Hereafter cited as Prayer.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 254 ff.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Rice (Ibid., p. 3) admits his indebtedness to A. T. Pierson, George Muller of Bristol; R. A. Torrey, How to Pray and Divine Healing; A. J. Gordon, The Ministry of Healing; and Charles A. Blanchard, Getting Things from God.

## The Significance of Petition and Intercession

Prayer is defined--as the title of the book would indicate--as "asking," and the answer to prayer is "receiving."

To this author prayer is a very simple and blessed matter of going to God daily for what one needs and desires, and getting it, and living in the fullness of joy of answered prayer which Jesus promised in John 16:24.<sup>14</sup>

Rice specifically omits praise, adoration, meditation and confession from his definition of prayer, because the emphasis on "spiritual fellowship" tends to ignore that men really get things from God.<sup>15</sup> Not only is prayer "asking"; the "answer to prayer is getting what you asked for."<sup>16</sup> By definition, the answer to prayer cannot be "No" or "Wait awhile"; it must be a "Yes" from God to the exact specifications of our request.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, some prayers are not answered because either God does not wish them answered--in a statement that poses some obvious difficulties,<sup>18</sup> Rice says that God does not will to heal or save everybody, but He does give

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 46 ff. This forced distinction between prayer (i.e., "asking") and other forms of communication with God is proved by reference to Dan. 9:4 and Phil. 4:6.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

"faith" for such miracles "often enough to prove that He is the miracle-working, prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God"--or because sin hinders prayer from being answered.<sup>19</sup> When faced with unanswered prayer, then, one must first rid himself of sin and submit himself to the will of God. Then, with the guidance of the Bible and the Holy Spirit, one should

seek to have a clear leading from God as to what [he] should pray for, and how. And if the Holy Spirit of God gives a divine expectancy, a conquering faith, then [he] may be sure God will answer the prayer.<sup>20</sup>

The key to Rice's understanding of proper intercessory and petitionary prayer is his insistence that prayer must be according to the will of God. If it is God's will to answer the prayer, the one praying will have "faith," that is, a conviction that he will get the thing he desires.<sup>21</sup> Such faith is the "gift of God."<sup>22</sup>

If God's Holy Spirit gives us faith for healing, then our prayer for healing will be answered. But if it is not God's will to heal, . . . then all of our will power will not create faith. . . . Where God is not pleased to heal in a particular case, He will not give faith for healing.<sup>23</sup>

The emphasis on "faith" as a conviction given by God saves Rice from the embarrassment that might come from

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 276 ff.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

his literal acceptance of such promises about the power of "faith" in prayer as are found in Matthew 17:20; 21:21 f. and Mark 11:22-24. No one has moved any mountains into the sea; so it must be that faith for such prayer is not the will of God!<sup>24</sup>

Confidence in prayer then, comes from the promises of a God whose nature it is to answer prayer<sup>25</sup> and the "faith" which God gives man that particular prayers will be heard because they are according to his will. This "faith" comes either as a promise in the Bible or as a revelation of the Holy Spirit. Such faith "presupposes a promise," and God is under obligation to keep his promises.<sup>26</sup> Rice rejects what he terms the "ultra-dispensationalist" position that miracles and answers to prayer are limited to the biblical period.<sup>27</sup> The promises are unlimited; "the Christian who can claim them can have whatsoever he wants, whether reasonable or unreasonable, . . . natural or supernatural."<sup>28</sup> Using Mark 9:23;

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 250-52.

<sup>25</sup>Rice, Miracles and Divine Healing, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup>Rice, Prayer, p. 163.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 101, 163, 167. It is at this point that Rice has his greatest difference with the Scofield Reference Bible.

<sup>28</sup>Rice, Miracles and Divine Healing, p. 23.

11:22-24; 16:17-18; John 14:12-14; 15:7 as proof texts, Rice concludes that, given the proper conditions of faith and correspondence with the will of God, God still answers prayer "without any limit as to degree."<sup>29</sup>

### Critique

Any critique of Rice's position should begin with positive appreciation for the sincere faith which his book indicates. Rice has been consistent in trying to keep his understanding of prayer from degenerating into pure magic. The answer to prayer is always dependent upon the will of God. Prayers for that which is contrary to God's will are fruitless.

Again, Rice does allow for the fact that God's will must--to some extent--be worked out through the believing community. For example, prayer for another's salvation is necessary because of what it does to the one praying. Without prayer, a ministry of witness is ineffective.<sup>30</sup>

There are, however, certain severe weaknesses in Rice's understanding of prayer. The first criticism is the common one leveled at those who classify themselves as Fundamentalists. An uncritical acceptance of the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Rice, Prayer, p. 319.

literal infallibility of Scripture leads to extravagant measures to explain the sweeping promises concerning prayer in the New Testament.

Second, Rice is weak insofar as he fails to come to grips with the question raised by natural science and the doctrine of God as they relate to the theology of intercessory prayer. Rice is apparently the heir of John Calvin in his grounding the answer to prayer solely in God's promises,<sup>31</sup> but there is a real question whether prayer does not then become God's dialogue with himself. If God both gives the "faith" that the prayer will be answered and also answers the prayer, one questions man's actual role in the I-thou dialogue of prayer.<sup>32</sup> In actual fact, prayer does not affect God or his actions in any way. The immutable will of a sovereign God stands unaffected in the presence of human petition.

Third, Rice's argument that prayers are not answered because they are not the product of a genuine "faith in

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, III: 20:14.

<sup>32</sup> C. A. Smith, Miracles and Divine Healing, p. 31, in debate with Rice, calls attention to Rice's belief that God gives faith for miracles as well as the miracle itself. "That puts the whole blame off on the Almighty!" Smith accuses Rice of being a "Semi-Hardshell" Baptist at this point.

God"<sup>33</sup> is too neat. All debate is cut off. Whatever happens is then defined as the will of God, the thing for which men should have prayed. Rice is really not consistent with himself at this point. He says that God is obligated to keep his promises--as known through Scripture or the Holy Spirit--but ignores passages such as Matthew 18:14 where God's will ("promise?") is revealed, but has not come to pass in the literal sense. Rice's insistence on persistence in prayer might be valid at points, but it is difficult to reconcile the need for such importunity with the belief that "faith" in prayer is a gift of God.

Understanding faith in terms of certitude rather than commitment means that the slightest doubt invalidates the prayer. More important, this view might tend to lead to constant self-condemnation, for all requests are not answered. The easy assumption would be that the petitioner had failed to have enough faith, though Rice would insist that such "faith" is not one's own doing, but the gift of God.

Finally, it might be questioned whether Rice's own evangelistic efforts are consistent with his understanding

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Rice says that some faith is self-deception--for example, that of the Christian Scientists--and God is under no obligation in such circumstances. Rice, Prayer, pp. 159 ff.

of prayer. Repeatedly, he speaks of the necessity that men pray for revivals, but the examples he offers<sup>34</sup> emphasize prayer as the expression of man's desire rather than as the prior conviction ("faith") that the answer would be forthcoming. Perhaps Rice would reply that such revival prayers are really prayers for more faith,<sup>35</sup> but his illustrations would not support such a rebuttal.

## II. KARL BARTH

One would expect Karl Barth, former pastor and now a giant among twentieth century theologians, to say something about prayer, and in volumes III/3 and III/4 of his Church Dogmatics<sup>36</sup> and in the published records of a seminar on prayer in the thought of the Reformation,<sup>37</sup> Barth has indeed spelled out his theology of prayer. The basic outline is found in III/4 in a section entitled "Prayer," though references are found at other points in Barth's system.

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<sup>34</sup>For example, cf. the account of a certain Texas revival, ibid., pp. 223-26.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>36</sup>Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Creation, Vol. III, Parts III and IV. Hereafter cited as CD, III/3 or CD, III/4.

<sup>37</sup>Prayer According to the Catechisms of the Reformation. Hereafter cited as Prayer.

### Prayer as a Christian Privilege

Primary in Barth's understanding is the fact that prayer is a "commanded activity."<sup>38</sup> As is the case with the act of "confession"--or witnessing--prayer honors God insofar as man seeks everything he needs from God's hands.<sup>39</sup> The command to pray grows out of both man's need for God's help in living an obedient Christian life<sup>40</sup> and God's gracious love which has "made common cause with man and wills to do so again."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, prayer is

a matter of man's responsibility before God, . . . because God wills to see and have him before Him as this praying man and therefore as a free man. But he who really prays to God has something to say to Him and dares to say it, not because he can, but because he is invited and summoned to do so.<sup>42</sup>

Barth is quite explicit in saying that prayer is for the Christian community, those who are made brethren by their common head, Jesus Christ.<sup>43</sup> But the Church does not form, as Barth puts it, an "exclusive circle." Rather, the Church prays in anticipation for those who have not yet believed; the community asks as the representative of mankind and the world.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 87.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Barth, Prayer, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 88.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 89-90.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 102 ff.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

For what may the Christian community ask? Barth turns to the Lord's Prayer for the answer. The first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer indicate that we are "to take up the cause of God and actively participate in it with our asking."<sup>45</sup> The rationale behind this is that God does not wish to create and triumph alone. He wills that his cause become ours. "He does not will to be God without us."<sup>46</sup> Not that man becomes a fellow-god or fellow-creator! Man's "modest participation" in the cause of God is just that he express his "need that God should prove and maintain His greatness as God."<sup>47</sup>

The last three petitions indicate that, just as men are to espouse the cause of God, they are also invited "to ask God on His side . . . to participate in their cause."<sup>48</sup> Man cannot be man without the grace of God, and grace must be asked for. Such asking is not selfish. Personal concern is elevated to a concern for all mankind and all creation when it is realized that the needs of men are legitimate insofar as they enable us to participate in God's cause, to be part of the glorifying of his name.<sup>49</sup>

Prayer is both a gift of God and an act of man.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 105 f.

<sup>50</sup>Barth, Prayer, pp. 20-39.

Man prays because God has first spoken to man and now expects man in return to speak to him. Prayer is the gift of God in that prior to prayer is the grace of God. In addition, "it is the Spirit of God that invites us and enables us to pray in a fitting manner."<sup>51</sup> Paul's words in Romans 8:26 f. do not, however, mean that man can omit prayer and depend upon the Holy Spirit. It is man's feeble and impotent performance of prayer--prayer said in light of what God has already said--for which the Spirit intercedes. Man must pray in "correspondence" to what God has given already.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, then, prayer is an act of man who knows his weakness and sin and calls upon God. Still, it is not a good work. It is not "a means of creating something, of making a gift to God and to ourselves; we are in the position of a man who can only receive."<sup>53</sup>

### Criteria of True Prayer

Three of Barth's five assertions about the nature of true prayer are crucial: (1) prayer rests in the command

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> Barth, CD, III/4, 70.

<sup>53</sup> Barth, Prayer, p. 27.

to pray; (2) prayer is basically petition; (3) prayer is sure of a "hearing."<sup>54</sup>

Prayer rests on the command to pray. Man is free before God in the sense that he is permitted to pray, and this permission has become a demand. Barth is driven to this position because it alone accounts for man's turning to God. It is not true, he says, that man turns to God because of: first, his need--that may teach us anxiety, defiance or resignation; second, his awareness of God as the source of goodness--that may lead us to resign ourselves to God's superior wisdom and goodness; third, his need for divine rather than human help--the awareness of the distance between God and man may lead instead to a reserve in addressing him!<sup>55</sup>

The real basis of prayer is man's freedom before God, the God-given permission to pray which, because it is given by God, becomes a command and therefore a necessity. As he is created free before God, man is simply placed under the superior, majestic and clear will of God.<sup>56</sup>

All possible objections and considerations, says Barth, are brushed aside by the knowledge that God wills prayer as the natural relationship between God and man.

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<sup>54</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 91-102, 106-10.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 91-92.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

Barth's indebtedness to Luther at this point is acknowledged openly.<sup>57</sup> Luther's "Greater Catechism" interprets the Third Commandment--that is, the one forbidding the misuse of God's name--as indicating the necessity of praising God's name and calling upon him in prayer.<sup>58</sup> Part III of the "Small Catechism" contains the assurance that "God will hear, for He both commanded us to pray and promised that He will hear."<sup>59</sup> Because prayer is commanded, lack of faith or merits on our part become irrelevant. What is required is obedience.<sup>60</sup>

Barth observes that Calvin does not emphasize the commandment to pray as much as Luther, but the difference--if any--is small. Calvin's discussion of prayer in the Institutes of the Christian Religion says that the hope of fulfillment of our prayers is "grounded in God's promises and depend[s] upon them."<sup>62</sup> If for no other reason, Christians should pray because God demands obedience to

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>58</sup>Cited in ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Philip Schaff (ed.), The Creeds of Christendom, III, 84.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Martin Luther's same emphasis on obedience in Works of Martin Luther, I, 228, and Luther's Works, XL, 278.

<sup>61</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 94.

<sup>62</sup>Calvin, Institutes, III:20:14.

the invitation to come into his presence.

It is certain that those who try to wriggle out of coming directly to God are not only rebellious and stubborn, but are also convicted of unbelief because they distrust the promises.<sup>63</sup>

By following the lead of the Reformers in seeing prayer as based on the command of God, Barth is able to cope with the three difficulties that would keep man from praying. First, he will pray in need and in plenty, realizing that in all circumstances he must accept everything--even that which he earns for himself--from the hand of God. Second, the humility which defers prayer in the face of an all-wise and all-knowing God evaporates when it is recognized that it is the all-wise and all-knowing God who commands men to approach him with their requests.<sup>64</sup> Third, the unavoidable reluctance of a man to pray who is aware of the "infinite qualitative distinction between God and himself" is dismissed. For man is not called upon to make such judgments but "simply to do what he is called by God to do."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., III:20:13.

<sup>64</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 96. Barth observes that those who piously refuse to "violate" God with their requests are perhaps secretly defiant of a God who violates us with the demand that we go to him with our petitions.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

Prayer is basically petition. Prayer is not primarily a matter of worship or repentance or thanksgiving. "In the first instance, it is an asking, a seeking and a knocking directed towards God."<sup>66</sup> Or, as Barth phrased it in his seminar,

[Christian] prayer means . . . asking [God] to give us what we lack--strength, courage, serenity, prudence--asking him to teach us how to obey the law and accomplish his commandments, and then that he may instruct us how to continue in believing . . . , and that he may renew our faith.<sup>67</sup>

It is important to emphasize prayer as "petition" because, first, it makes man refrain from viewing prayer as something worthy that he hands to God, and, second, it places man in his proper relationship to God as one who has need of God in everything.<sup>68</sup> Again and again Barth implies that the surprising thing in the Christian revelation is not that God is so holy and rich in comparison with man's unworthiness and poverty, but rather the fact that man can draw near to God as a child approaches his father.<sup>69</sup>

Obviously, Christian prayer includes the elements of thanksgiving, penitence and worship, but only insofar as

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<sup>66</sup>Barth, III/3, 268.

<sup>67</sup>Barth, Prayer, p. 19. The subjective nature of these petitions is obvious.

<sup>68</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 97-98; cf. Prayer, p. 27.

<sup>69</sup>Barth, III/3, 268.

prayer is regarded as primarily petition; to thank God is to petition him as he so kindly invites us to do; to be repentant is to do as God commands (i.e., pray) despite our imperfections; to worship, love and fear God is supremely to do what he wants of man. Thanksgiving, penitence, and worship are, then, all elements of petitionary prayer.<sup>70</sup>

Making petition the heart of prayer is dangerous in light of the human sin--egotism, anxiety, passion, shortsightedness and stupidity--which might distort and misuse it. In such case, says Barth, one may take comfort in the fact that prayer (even imperfect prayer) is commanded by God. Even man's unselfish prayers are "sanctified" and given a "cleansed meaning" which he is unable to give them. Because the intervention of Christ and the Holy Spirit makes prayer "a movement in the cycle which goes out from God and returns to God," man may safely rest in the knowledge that "He understands us better than we do ourselves."<sup>71</sup> Petitions, then, are to be made humbly, yet boldly.

Prayer is sure of a "hearing." True prayer is confident of a "hearing," that is, "the reception and

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<sup>70</sup>Barth, III/4, 99-100.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

adoption of the human request into God's plan and will."<sup>72</sup>

It is not a sign of weakness, but of strength that God wills to alter his intentions in order to follow the direction of man's prayers.<sup>73</sup> God answers prayers; he listens and he acts.

He does not act in the same way whether we pray or not. Prayer exerts an influence upon God's action, even upon his existence. This is what the word "answer" means.<sup>74</sup>

Confidence in God's "hearing" takes the form of an unquestioning certainty. Again following Luther and Calvin, Barth asserts that "doubt is not permitted."<sup>75</sup> The answer to prayer is not an open question. Instead of doubting the divine hearing, we are to pray as those who have already been heard.<sup>76</sup> How can one be so sure of an answer to prayer? What is the basis for the faith that our asking will be taken up into the will of God?

First of all, as one would expect from a Christologically oriented theology, the answer is found in the

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 106. At this point Barth sounds very much like those discussed in Chapter III.

<sup>73</sup>Barth, Prayer, pp. 22 ff.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 28; CD, III/4, 106. Doubt about prayer is doubt about God himself, and thus is to be equated with idolatry (CD, III/4, 109).

<sup>76</sup>Barth, Prayer, p. 28.

fact that "in Jesus Christ man is from eternity bound up with God, and God from eternity with man."<sup>77</sup> In Jesus Christ, humanity stands in the presence of God. Men thus pray in Christ, in conjunction with his own heavenly intercession. The Father cannot fail to answer the Son nor the Son's brethren who now pray in and with him.<sup>78</sup> Barth says that prayer "in the name of Jesus" must be understood not only as prayer under Jesus' leadership and in unity with his asking but also as prayer which has the support of his power, power which comes from Christ's unity with the Father.<sup>79</sup>

In the second place, confidence in God's "hearing" prayer comes with the rejection of the mistaken idea that there is a divine "immutability" which rules out any possibility that God can be conditioned in one way or another by his creation. Rather, Barth says, God is "immutable as the living God." His majesty, omnipotence and sovereignty consist in "the fact that He can give to the requests of this creature a place in His will."<sup>80</sup>

There is no creaturely freedom which can limit or compete with the sole sovereignty and efficacy of

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<sup>77</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 108.

<sup>78</sup>Barth, Prayer, pp. 21 f.; CD, III/3, 274 f., 287; CD, III/4, 107 f.

<sup>79</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 108.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

God. But permitted by God, and indeed willed and created by Him, there is the freedom of the friends of God concerning whom he has determined that without abandoning the helm for one moment He will still allow Himself to be determined by them.<sup>81</sup>

In the freedom of his own sovereignty, God allows man to participate in the divine omnipotence and work, in the magnifying of the divine glory.<sup>82</sup>

### The Object of Prayer

The answer to prayer is based on man's unity with Christ and in the sovereign will of God, but what may one pray for? Are the legitimate objects of prayer limited? Contrary to John R. Rice, Barth does not begin with the absolute will of God as the determinative factor in the answering of prayer. Rather, says Barth, God takes man's desire into account. Is this a "blank check" view of prayer? Not for Barth.

Prayer, as has been noted, takes place in the context of the Christian community. The individual prays, but it is as a member of the community.<sup>83</sup> As a community, the Church prays for the one needful thing: "that it may really be His community."<sup>84</sup> The Church prays for God's

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<sup>81</sup>Barth, CD, III/3, 285.

<sup>82</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 109.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 102 ff.

<sup>84</sup>Barth, CD, III/3, 277.

love and for his Word in order to serve more effectively God, that it may more effectively witness in the world to which it has been commissioned.<sup>85</sup>

What the Christian needs, what he can and must legitimately desire for himself both physically and spiritually . . . is that he himself in each specific situation, and also those around him, should be equipped and usable and ready in the service which Jesus Christ has assigned to His people, and in which they can have their salvation and glory.<sup>86</sup>

The one great answer to prayer is Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God concerned Himself with the world and man, accepted solidarity with man, and accomplished his deliverance.<sup>87</sup>

In the fact that Jesus is there, the world is already helped, and everything that creation needs, and at the heart of creation man, is already provided.<sup>88</sup>

In this sense, then, "the hearing precedes the asking"; God has answered prayer before man begins to pray. It is on the basis that prayer is already "heard" that one feels the freedom to pray.<sup>89</sup>

Prayer, then, is primarily the Church's petition, based on the prior gift of God in Jesus Christ, for God's continued presence and help in the Church's ordained task of witnessing. Because, however, of his high regard for

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., pp. 277 f.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 281

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 270; cf. Prayer, p. 59.

the instructive value of the Lord's Prayer,<sup>90</sup> Barth cannot completely exclude from prayer the more mundane elements of existence. The petition for "daily bread" is interpreted as the command to pray for the necessities of physical existence<sup>91</sup> and for the "fulness of life," the "eternal grace," of which bread is the temporal sign.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, Barth seems to withdraw any real petitionary element to prayer by interpreting the prayer for bread as follows:

Therefore, our prayer must begin with this implication: Thou givest us our bread for tomorrow, yet, thou givest it us today. Thou art our faithful Creator, and thou dost not cease being so for an instant.<sup>93</sup>

And since thou art his [i.e., Jesus Christ] Father, . . . we know that thou hast prepared for us the meal, the complete feast, both temporal and eternal.<sup>94</sup>

As a final indication that petition is not really petition, but an acknowledgement of our dependence upon God the Creator, Barth further interprets the prayer for "daily bread" as a prayer that man might acknowledge his role as a servant in the service of other men.

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<sup>90</sup>Here again Barth is a child of the Reformation. Because the Reformers thought that prayer should be disciplined, they emphasized the Lord's Prayer as a model by which men might measure the acceptability of their prayers before God.

<sup>91</sup>Barth, CD, III/3, 280; Prayer, pp. 59-60.

<sup>92</sup>Barth, Prayer, pp. 60-61.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 62. (Emphasis mine.)      <sup>94</sup>Ibid., pp.63-64.

And grant that those who are particularly threatened by hunger, death, and this precariousness of the human condition, may meet brothers and sisters who have open eyes and ears and feel their responsibility.<sup>95</sup>

### Critique

It is to Barth's credit that he has seen that prayer is not only a concrete action but is the basis, the "undertone" of all human actions.<sup>96</sup> Prayer involves the entirety of life. Barth points out in particular that all proper theological work is an act of prayer, for without prayer theology loses the vertical dimension, the judgment which only the act of communion can reveal.<sup>97</sup> The understanding of Holy Scripture itself is impossible without prayer.<sup>98</sup> It is in prayer that man overcomes the "contradiction" that a sinner may stand before God as God's own child and realizes the work of the Holy Spirit, which is the power of Christ's resurrection and therefore the power of divine justification.<sup>99</sup> Obedience to the command to love one's

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., pp. 63-64.      <sup>96</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 89.

<sup>97</sup>Karl Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction, pp. 159-70; Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Vol. I, Part I, 25, 83. Hereafter cited as CD, I/1. Cf. Barth, Prayer, p. 9, where the Reformation is called an "act of continuous prayer."

<sup>98</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Vol. I, Part II, 684, 695. Hereafter cited as CD, I/2.

<sup>99</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of

neighbor is contingent upon the "assurance" one receives in the act of casting his care about himself and his neighbors upon God in prayer.<sup>100</sup>

Again, it is evident that Barth has made a bold attempt to give man a creative role in God's work. By basing the possibility of petition on the doctrine of the Incarnation--God's own self-limitation--Barth has hoped to make room for humanity's sharing in God's purposes for the created order.<sup>101</sup>

If ever there was a miserable anthropomorphism, it is the hallucination of a divine immutability which rules out the possibility that God can let Himself be conditioned in this way or that by His creature.<sup>102</sup>

It is at this point, however, that some questions must be raised. Has Barth really delivered himself from a view of the divine sovereignty which excludes human freedom? Barth would answer positively by asserting that God in his sovereign will has given man a place at his side. But does man really add anything to God? Is God's

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the Word of God, Vol. II, Part II, 763. Hereafter cited as CD, II/2.

<sup>100</sup>Barth, CD, I/2, 454.

<sup>101</sup>Note that Tillich interprets prayer not in terms of the Incarnation but in terms of God as Creator and Sustainer. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 252-70.

<sup>102</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 109.

"humanity"<sup>103</sup> really enriched or affected in any way by man? Daniel Day Williams has praised Barth for attempting to get rid of "the impersonal absolute lurking behind traditional doctrines of the attributes [of God]," but thinks Barth has not escaped the problematic views of human freedom inherent in Augustinianism and Calvinism.<sup>104</sup>

Barth bases his case [for the reality of prayer] in God's command that we pray, but what there is ontologically in God that could be affected in any way by prayer is not stated.<sup>105</sup>

There are several points at which man's real standing vis a vis God seem to be in doubt. Despite the assertion that God in his freedom wills to "harken to the prayer of faith," in the final analysis God does not hand the government of the world order over to believers. "The will of God is resolutely and finally set above the will of men."<sup>106</sup> The will of man--a necessary element in any true personal confrontation with God<sup>107</sup>--may take place only

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<sup>103</sup>Karl Barth, The Humanity of God, pp. 49-51.

<sup>104</sup>Daniel Day Williams, "The New Theological Situation," Theology Today, XXIV, No. 4 (January, 1968), 452 f.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 453.

<sup>106</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of God, Vol. II, Part I, 511. Hereafter cited as CD, II/1. God's sovereignty triumphs over man's freedom here as well as in Barth's doctrine of Election (cf. CD, II/2, 3-508).

<sup>107</sup>Cf. P. T. Forsyth, The Soul of Prayer, pp. 90 f.

within the framework of what has been fixed, either positively or negatively, by the will of God.

Within this sphere our willing may be in harmony with the will of God or in opposition to it. But . . . we cannot will at all if we are not willing to decide within the sphere fixed by the will of God.<sup>108</sup>

Everything that exists is dependent on His will. . . . And His will is pure will, determined exclusively by Himself, to act or not to act, or to act in a particular way.<sup>109</sup>

In addition to this strong emphasis on the will of God, Barth seems to qualify the extent of man's cooperation in God's work. Man's "modest participation in the work of Jesus Christ" consists in expressing his "need" that God continue to "maintain His greatness as God."<sup>110</sup> But this prayer, says Barth, is already answered! For Jesus Christ is God's positive answer to the request that he identify himself with the needs of mankind. In Christ is revealed the God who is not against but absolutely for the world.<sup>111</sup> Despite what Barth says about petition as the heart of prayer, prayer seems to be more an affirmation of man's condition and what God has already done to relieve it.

In the third place, Barth, as does Paul,<sup>112</sup> risks

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<sup>108</sup>Barth, CD, II/1, 556.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 560.

<sup>110</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 104.

<sup>111</sup>Cf. Barth, CD, III/3, 271.

<sup>112</sup>Cf. Rom. 8:26 f.

making prayer God's conversation with himself because of the strong emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer. In all fairness, Barth wishes to interpret the function of the Spirit as interceding for and translating the inadequate words of man<sup>113</sup>--words which man is obliged to continue--but the effect is that prayer is God's work.<sup>114</sup>

In prayer . . . God Himself speaks through His Spirit the true and decisive Word which can be heard and is heard already even though it cannot be attained or uttered by man.<sup>115</sup>

Finally, Barth's understanding of prayer is weak because he does not come to grips with the relationship of intercessory prayer to the doctrine of God's providence,<sup>116</sup> nor does Barth attempt to answer the questions of God's relationship to a world understood in terms of scientific law. It is questionable whether a biblicist-Reformation

<sup>113</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 90.

<sup>114</sup>P. T. Forsyth shares this very weakness, for his emphasis on the function of the Holy Spirit in prayer (cf. Forsyth, The Soul of Prayer, pp. 58, 70; J. H. Rogers, The Theology of P. T. Forsyth, pp. 185 ff.) seems to negate the claim that man confronts God in prayer with his own will. Does prayer really affect God (Soul of Prayer, pp. 15, 38, 82 ff.), or is the "dialogue of grace . . . really the monologue of the divine nature in self-communing love" (Ibid., p. 32)?

<sup>115</sup>Barth, CD, III/4, 90.

<sup>116</sup>Barth's treatment of providence in CD, III/3, 3-57, does not mention prayer.

approach to understanding prayer, an approach which categorically excludes the doubter as a non-believer,<sup>117</sup> will speak to the needs of an empirically oriented society.

In the final analysis, Barth bases his confidence that prayer is heard on the prior confidence in God's graciousness. He grants that prayer in the Christian sense is inconceivable, but God's grace is even more inconceivable. If man participates by faith in the larger truth of God's gracious election of man, he can participate in the special truth that God listens to prayer. It is an impossible possibility--impossible perhaps even by the standards of Barth's own system--which is believed because we are commanded to believe.

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<sup>117</sup>Barth, Prayer, p. 28; CD, III/4, 106.

## CHAPTER V

### PRAYER IS EFFECTIVE PRIMARILY IN AND THROUGH THE ONE PRAYING

Two different ways that prayer may be regarded as involving God's objective action in the world have now been examined. In the first case, prayer is seen as a factor which God actually takes into account as he directs the created order with his sustaining activity. The will of man exercises its influence on the will of God--though this does not imply a type of magical, automatic influencing of God's action. In the second approach, God's sovereign power to act within his created order is asserted in terms that depreciate man's part in the process. Prayer, in this case, is not so much asking God for something as it is searching for and assenting to God's prior will in the matter. God's freedom to act is not in question; the question is the part that man is allowed to play!

There is a third approach. Here the role of man, the pray-er, is magnified to the extent that the answer to intercessory prayer is understood to be channeled through the one praying. God is limited by the laws and purpose of his own creation to the extent that man is the only really pliable object of his providential activity. That is to say, this view of intercessory prayer is essentially "subjective"; its major interest is in the relationship

between God and the one praying. As William Temple put it, the aim of prayer is

union with God, not changing His mind, but changing our own, in order that, as a result of our faith, our realisation that we depend upon Him, He may be able to do for us, or through us, what, until we are conscious of this, He cannot do.<sup>1</sup>

There are varying degrees of this subjective emphasis. Some, like Georgia Harkness, wish to affirm God's activity in the world process, an emphasis which might allow for his help in time of need. Others, like John Burnaby, seem to limit God's present activity in the created order solely to the receptive believer. Harry Emerson Fosdick falls somewhere between these two, though perhaps a bit closer to Miss Harkness. Others who stress the role of the subject in prayer include: Eric Hayman,<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Heiler,<sup>3</sup> Frank C. Laubach,<sup>4</sup> William Temple,<sup>5</sup> Charles F. Whiston,<sup>6</sup> and H. D. Wright.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Temple, Christian Faith and Life, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup>Eric Hayman, Prayer and the Christian Life.

<sup>3</sup>Friedrich Heiler, Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion, pp. 356-63.

<sup>4</sup>Frank C. Laubach, Prayer, the Mightiest Force in the World. Laubach interprets prayer in terms of mental telepathy; prayer persuades other men to listen to God (ibid., pp. 54 ff.).

<sup>5</sup>Temple, op. cit., pp. 110-18.

<sup>6</sup>Charles F. Whiston, Teach Us To Pray, pp. 115-35.

<sup>7</sup>Harold D. Wright, "Intercessory Prayer in the New Testament" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964).

## I. GEORGIA HARKNESS

Georgia Harkness is a teacher and ordained Methodist minister who is, along with Harry Emerson Fosdick, generally regarded as a representative of "Neo-Liberalism" in American theology.<sup>8</sup> Neo-Liberalism is regarded as having corrected Liberal deficiencies in the doctrines of Sin, Christ and the Church, but it has retained the Liberal emphasis upon the immanence of God in the whole of life. Neo-Liberalism did not significantly alter the view that "God's way of doing things is the way of progressive change and natural law."<sup>9</sup>

Presuppositions

It will be obvious that Liberalism's view of God's immanent presence in the world order has colored the view in both Harkness and Fosdick.<sup>10</sup> Both will assert the goodness of creation as the chosen instrument of God's action in the world. As Harkness declares, the natural order is God's; it does not stand over against God as an

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. William Hordern, A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology, pp. 103-20, 216.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>10</sup>It will be seen that John Burnaby's understanding of prayer begins not with a view of providence--i.e., God's relationship with the natural order--but with an understanding of the meaning of the Incarnation.

enemy. Because nature's laws are God's laws, "God does not deviate from His orderly ways of working" simply because man wishes.<sup>11</sup> Harkness would insist, however, that nature is not a closed system. Though orderly, God is as free as man to "use nature" to express his purposes.

### Petition and Intercession

Prayer, says Miss Harkness, takes place when man meets God in living, personal encounter. Prayer is both a communication and a response. It is an opening of the soul to God and, in the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, it is "an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will."<sup>12</sup> Petition and intercession take their rightful place among the elements of prayer, though priority of sequence is given to adoration and thanksgiving.<sup>13</sup> Petition is, however, central, for prayer in the most restricted sense is petition.<sup>14</sup> For what, then, may man petition God? Five areas of legitimate petition

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<sup>11</sup>Georgia Harkness, The Providence of God, p. 138. Hereafter cited as Providence.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 122 f. Cf. Georgia Harkness, Prayer and the Common Life, pp. 25-30. Hereafter cited as Prayer.

<sup>13</sup>Harkness, Prayer, pp. 43 ff. Adoration is the point at which religion (which glorifies God) is to be distinguished from magic (which uses God).

<sup>14</sup>Harkness, Providence, p. 129.

are suggested:

The principal types of petition are for a sense of God's presence, for spiritual and moral help, for material goods, for changes in external events, for the recovery of health.<sup>15</sup>

The first two types of petition are basic and should be the center of most praying. Such prayers may be described in psychological terms, but the Christian who understands God as immanent in the world order will attribute such help as is received to God's action.<sup>16</sup> Petitions for material goods involve man's responsible cooperation with God's orderly process in order to get such goods. Prayers for changes in external events are primarily aimed at increasing the mature use of human intelligence in the situations of life, though within certain limits God is free to change the external situation. Prayer for the recovery of health involves a psychosomatic understanding of much of man's illness.<sup>17</sup> In sum, the prayer of petition must take into account both the freedom of the individual

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<sup>15</sup>Harkness, Prayer, p. 61; cf. Providence, pp. 129 ff.

<sup>16</sup>Harkness, Prayer, pp. 66, 36-40. The answer to the skeptic who understands the answer to prayer as a sort of self-hypnosis lies in the answer one gives to the larger question, namely, whether God does anything. "If this larger question is answered in the affirmative, the psychological or subjective aspects of prayer become ways in which God works in cooperation with the human spirit" (Harkness, Providence, p. 132).

<sup>17</sup>Harkness, Prayer, pp. 66-72.

and the fixity of nature. Some things, but not all things, can be changed by prayer. When the outcome is fixed, prayer should be for the grace to adapt ourselves to the situation.<sup>18</sup>

It is in the power God imparts to work with him to do his will in spite of the frustration of deep desires that the true focus of petition lies.<sup>19</sup>

But what of prayer for others? Jesus practiced intercessory prayer, and the compulsion to pray seems to be natural to the human spirit. Yet, "to many minds, prayer for others, if carried beyond its obvious effects in making one individual more sensitive to the needs of another . . . , is an enigma."<sup>20</sup> Intercessory prayer which makes a man more sensitive and which is a source of psychological strength for the man being prayed for is justified by its results, but it need not involve God at all. The Christian understanding of intercessory prayer must mean that, as a result of prayer, God does something he would not otherwise do.<sup>21</sup> As the world is an orderly one

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 72-73.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>20</sup>Harkness, Providence, p. 140.

<sup>21</sup>Harkness, Prayer, p. 77.

of cause and effect,<sup>22</sup> the answers to prayer are caused by God even though man cannot see the connection.<sup>23</sup>

Intercessory prayer may thus be understood as God's release of his Spirit and healing, creative forces within a law-abiding world, such release being dependent in part upon our willingness to work with him for the furtherance of other persons' good.<sup>24</sup>

The words "in part" are important, for they emphasize Harkness' insistence that, while a psychological change in the pray-er and the one prayed for is God's "primary mode of response," the issue is whether God acts when one intercedes for others!<sup>25</sup> Harkness agrees with Harold De Wolf that prayer "implies the exerting of an effect on God"--not in the form of changing God's will, but by opening "channels of grace into another's life."<sup>26</sup> How this is done, Harkness says, is not known,<sup>27</sup> but she

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<sup>22</sup>Harkness' rigid understanding of causality is a definite weakness.

<sup>23</sup>Harkness, Prayer, p. 77.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 77-78. Emphasis mine.

<sup>25</sup>Harkness, Providence, p. 142.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 142 f.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 143. In her earlier book, Prayer and and Common Life, p. 78, Harkness pointed out that one aspect of a law-abiding world is the effect human beings have on one another. Even when normal means of stimulation and communication are closed, "one may still believe that in God's world spiritual connections are still open."

is unwilling to dismiss categorically the possibility that God may make changes in the world of things. Even if such changes are effected, they are brought about by a law-abiding God using laws which man has not yet discovered.<sup>28</sup> The part that prayer plays in the releasing of God's powers may be itself in accordance with one of God's laws.<sup>29</sup>

The basic thrust of Harkness' position is, then, obviously subjective. Intercessory prayer is neither a way of coercing God nor a substitute for our own efforts, "but a channel to the widest divine-human co-operation" inasmuch as God uses both ourselves and our prayers to work his will.<sup>30</sup>

The basic fact about both petition for ourselves and prayer for others is the new spiritual situation it creates, the greater outreach of the human heart to God, the closer fellowship of man with man and of man with God in the ties of personal communion thereby made more binding.<sup>31</sup>

### Critique

Georgia Harkness has faced realistically the problems raised by those who wish to see some meaning in the act of

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<sup>28</sup>Georgia Harkness, Conflicts in Religious Thought, pp. 268, 260.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>30</sup>Harkness, Prayer, p. 79.

<sup>31</sup>Harkness, Providence, p. 143.

prayer but cannot, and she rightly perceives the part that prayer may play in dealing with the complex issues of our day--issues which, without the spiritual and moral resources which prayer supports, will otherwise continue to be mis-directed and limited by self-interest and error.<sup>32</sup> In a compelling way Miss Harkness has called attention to the effectiveness of prayer in dealing with frustrated lives, fear, loneliness, grief, sin and guilt, and the problems of world peace.<sup>33</sup> And she has made prayer respectable--at least to the Christian--by basing it firmly upon basic Christian beliefs about the nature of man and God.<sup>34</sup>

It is at the point of her understanding of God that Georgia Harkness may be most open to question. To be more specific, Harkness' understanding of the providence of God places an automatic limitation on her understanding of prayer. The providence of God is defined as "the goodness of God and His guiding, sustaining care" in the entire world of both nature and personality.<sup>35</sup> This understanding of providence is derived not only from biblical thought but from personal experience of sustaining grace in the

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<sup>32</sup>Harkness, Prayer, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 167 ff.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-41.

<sup>35</sup>Harkness, Providence, p. 17.

midst of trial.<sup>36</sup> Harkness interprets the Biblical witness as speaking of grace within adverse circumstances, not deliverance from them.

Providence means the guiding hand, the encompassing goodness, the supporting power of God in any situation, however dark, however evil, however unwilled by Him. . . . However much His will may be thwarted [by us or others], God never forsakes us.<sup>37</sup>

Such a view of providence presupposes a belief in God as the Creator of an essentially good and orderly world, a world best adapted for the growth of personality.<sup>38</sup> God is sovereign, but his sovereignty has a "self-limitation" in that he has "chosen to create a world of natural order and human freedom";<sup>39</sup> the order of nature is maintained even when it causes suffering because this is the best kind of world to conserve human well-being!<sup>40</sup> Though the world is good, it nevertheless has its darker aspects from which man needs redemption. Thus God through

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-30.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 32. This has reference to "special providence"--that is, the individual's belief in the sustaining presence of God in particular events--rather than to "general providence" which is simply the goodness of God in the overall structure of creation (ibid., pp. 32-34).

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 78; cf. H. H. Farmer, The World and God, p. 299.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

both "natural grace"<sup>41</sup> and the grace revealed in Jesus Christ, and through the cooperation of man,<sup>42</sup> redeems man from sin, suffering and frustrated anxiety.<sup>43</sup>

In light of this understanding of providence, it is not surprising that Harkness can really allow only for God's potential to change man; not his "good" creation. The effective result of prayer can only be in the subjective realm. Miss Harkness has, in effect, limited God to the laws of his own creation to the extent that God is almost identified with the order of Nature--only the assertion that God enters into personal communion with man saves her from this accusation. Again, it is plain that Miss Harkness has neglected the Biblical understanding that the world itself, the "order of nature" which Miss Harkness thinks constitutes the best of all possible worlds, is perverted. As Brunner points out, it seems as if demonic

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<sup>41</sup>The manifestation of God's love in the entire created order (ibid., p. 95).

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-102. This is as about as far as Harkness goes in relating prayer to salvation. Salvation, she says, requires first an awareness of need. Such awareness comes "most often, if not always, through a human agency"--either the human form of Jesus viewed in the pages of the Bible or the loves and words of his followers (Understanding the Christian Faith, pp. 115-16. Emphasis mine). Prayer is related to God's redemptive work only to the extent that it enables the praying Christian to be a more effective witness.

forces in the world order are in rebellion against the Creator;<sup>44</sup> as Paul says, the whole creation groans in travail (Romans 8:22) and longs for its completion. The world order may not so easily be identified as God's final word. To limit God's activity to the natural processes, the "laws" he has ordained, makes God a prisoner of what may be demonic.

To sum up, it is Miss Harkness' limited view of Providence that results in her limited--that is, subjective --view of effective prayer. While she affirms God is constantly creating, sustaining and directing the total process, an assertion which should allow for a very open view of prayer, the end result is the belief that God does not deviate from his orderly way of working, he only "uses" what is already in nature's ordered framework.<sup>45</sup>

## II. HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK

It was at the turn of the century during Fosdick's first year at Union Theological Seminary that he suffered a nervous breakdown which he has described in his

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<sup>44</sup>Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics: Vol. II, pp. 17-19.

<sup>45</sup>Harkness, Providence, pp. 150, 138.

autobiography as the "most hideous experience of my life."<sup>46</sup> The result of that experience was that he first learned the meaning of prayer. Indeed, the book in which he has spelled out his understanding of prayer would never have been written, he thinks, without this personal crisis in his life.<sup>47</sup> The fruit of Fosdick's renewed interest in the subject of prayer was the publication in 1915 of his book, The Meaning of Prayer. In this book Fosdick provided an apology for the common man whose lack of understanding about prayer meant a less than meaningful prayer life.<sup>48</sup>

#### Prayer as Communion with God

Fosdick defines prayer in terms of the practice as he sees it in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. As he says,

Prayer is neither chiefly begging for things, nor is it merely self-communion; it is that loftiest experience within the reach of any soul, communion with God.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Living of These Days, p. 72.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. C. Earl Leininger, "The Christian Apologetic of Harry Emerson Fosdick" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1967), for an excellent treatment of Fosdick's entire apologetic method.

<sup>49</sup>Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Meaning of Prayer, p. 30. Hereafter cited as MP.

By defining prayer as a communion with God, Fosdick believes that he effectively overcomes the dilemma which faces modern man when he thinks about the subject of prayer. For modern man tends to identify prayer either as an effective way of getting something from God, that is begging from God, or prayer is interpreted in subjective terms as simply a "reflex action of man's own mind."<sup>50</sup> That prayer is not merely a subjective reflex action is shown not only by the example of Jesus but also by the universality of the practice of prayer. Fosdick points out that mankind has never really outgrown the practice of prayer. He notes that prayer has proved adaptable to all cultures in all stages of both religion and intellectual development. Indeed, he says, prayer is "latent in the life of every one of us."<sup>51</sup> Fosdick asks whether all men everywhere could have been talking to a silent world from which no answer could come. This he sees as being inconceivable.

If we can be sure of anything, is it not this--that wherever a human function has persisted, unwearied by time, uncrushed by disappointment, rising to noblest form and finest use in the noblest and finest soul, that function corresponds to some Reality?<sup>52</sup>

The second horn of the dilemma with which Fosdick

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

deals is the misunderstanding that sees prayer as begging from God. This raises the question of God's relationship to the natural order, that is the question of providence. Most particularly does it raise the question of natural law which is the great stumbling block for modern man. For as Fosdick points out in many places, most modern men reject the old "supernaturalism" that seems to be the norm in the biblical picture.<sup>53</sup> Fosdick wishes to reject the traditional concept of the supernatural.

All too commonly today supernaturalism means splitting the universe in two--on one side nature, run by natural laws, on the other side the supernatural that ever and again breaks into the natural, disturbs its regular procedures, and suspends its laws.<sup>54</sup>

The problem with this definition of supernaturalism is that it pushes God out to the edge of the universe into the realm of the supernatural and, with the advancement of science, gradually eliminates God from the picture. Again the typical definition of supernaturalism is not congenial to the modern way of thinking. Modern man is unable to conceive of the universe as being split in two, the natural on the one hand and the supernatural on the other. If the universe is materialistic at heart, then that is all it is.

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<sup>53</sup>Harry Emerson Fosdick, Dear Mr. Brown: Letters to a Person Perplexed about Religion, pp. 46 f. Hereafter cited as DMB.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

But if it is a spiritual system, as Fosdick says, "then it is spiritual throughout." It is a certainty, however, that the universe is "not a bifurcated cosmos with the natural downstairs and the supernatural upstairs."<sup>55</sup>

### Prayer and Natural Law

It is obvious, Fosdick notes, that prayer is meaningless unless one believes in the controlling providence of God that makes all things work together for good.<sup>56</sup>

The problem is that the popular understanding of natural law seems to rule out all personal activity on the part of a providential God. Combating the idea of an all-powerful natural law is, then, a major task for the Christian apologist.

Fosdick points out that in actuality natural laws are only statements of how things regularly happen; that is, natural laws are really statistical averages. They express man's understanding of the universe, but they do not exhaust its depths.

Therefore, just as the category of providence is man's way of expressing the dimension of divine personal presence--the immanent, sustaining activity of God--so the category of natural law may express God's providential ways of action which science has partially plotted.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>56</sup>Fosdick, MP, p. 90.

<sup>57</sup>Leininger, op. cit., p. 247; cf. Fosdick, MP, pp. 99 f., and DMB, pp. 52 f.

The personality of man, says Fosdick, is not the slave of law-abiding forces in the world. Rather men use the "laws" of nature to accomplish their own will; it is not a question of breaking or changing natural law, but of using and combining the forces of nature to accomplish things which these forces would not accomplish by themselves. If man can do it, if man is the master of the law-abiding forces of the universe, why should not God also be a master of the forces which he himself has created.

Our limited control of universal forces may be a counterpart of God's unlimited control. Then all cause would be personal and all procedure that we call natural would be God's regular ways of acting.<sup>58</sup>

The procedures of nature are pliable in the hands of free human intelligence and will. And God, says Fosdick, is no less free than man. Therefore it is impossible that the powers of the universe which are pliable in man's hands are stiff and rigid in the hands of God.

The whole analogy of human experience suggests that the world is not governed by law; that it is governed by God according to law. He providentially utilizes, manipulates, and combines his own invariable ways of acting to serve his own eternal purposes.<sup>59</sup>

God's providential working in and through the natural order of the universe does not mean that the individual

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<sup>58</sup>Fosdick, MP, pp. 101-102.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

man is unimportant. The individual is important because "personality is the one infinitely valuable treasure in the universe."<sup>60</sup> Thus, one sees that, though man is realistically limited by his environment and circumstances, he is important in the eyes of God and does have freedom of choice within the limits that have been set for him. Man, in turn, is responsible for the use of that freedom.<sup>61</sup> All of this is important for Fosdick's understanding of prayer, for prayer can only be a real and vital force when God takes man into account, when man's well-being, his personality, is the ultimate value of God.

### Intercessory Prayer

What in actual fact does intercessory prayer accomplish? Fosdick acknowledges that the practice of intercession affects the one who does the praying. It purges a man's spirit of hatefulness, selfishness and pride. In the act of prayer there emerges the gracious and loving spirit that should be a part of every man's life. Again the act of intercession affects the lives of those for whom the prayer is made if they are aware that someone is praying for them. Fosdick cites several examples of those

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>61</sup>Fosdick, DMB, pp. 70 f.; Leininger, op. cit., pp. 249 f.

whose lives were empowered because of their knowledge that others were praying for them.<sup>62</sup>

Fosdick is not content, however, with affirming only a subjective or psychological value of prayer. He says that, in addition, those who practice intercession believe and are convinced that they are "using the creative power of personality in opening ways for God to work his will. They have been convinced that their intercession wrought consequences for their friends."<sup>63</sup> But in what way are these consequences wrought in behalf of those for whom prayer is made? Fosdick asserts that this does not mean that prayers persuade a thoughtless or an unwilling God to do something that he would not otherwise do for a friend or for anyone else for whom we pray. As he says, a rational belief in intercessions must take into consideration two essential truths: "First, the Christian gospel about God; and second, the intimate relationships that make the world of persons an organic whole."<sup>64</sup>

The first truth, that is, the Christian gospel about God, concerns the fact that God desires in himself the welfare of all men. His love and his purpose for good is evidenced throughout creation. Thus, intercession in the

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<sup>62</sup>Fosdick, MP, p. 178.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

presence of the Christian God does not mean persuading him to do something he does not wish to do or will not do. Rather it means aligning oneself with the eternal purpose of the Father for his children. It means "to be carried along with him in his desire for all men's good."<sup>65</sup> Fosdick points to the example of Jesus Christ whose confidence in prayer was just because of his awareness of God's perfect knowledge and love. Prayer, says Fosdick, is "simply giving the wise and good God an opportunity to do what his wisdom and love want done."<sup>66</sup>

Just as God has given man the responsibility of cooperating with him in the acts of thinking and working, so God has ordained that some things must be contingent upon man's praying. Man is not to be resigned to God's will, but cooperate with God's will. This is the truest expression of the Christian attitude in prayer.<sup>67</sup> The effect of such intercessory prayer is that man is enabled to listen to God, to hear the will of God for himself and the other men. Intercessory prayer in this respect concerns not what man wishes, but what God wishes to give, that is, it is the open hand reaching out to God. Until men pray, says Fosdick, there are some things which God

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

just cannot do through them. But when a man does pray, he is "one of God's open doors into the world."<sup>68</sup>

We have, then, two fundamentally opposed ideas of prayer: one, that by begging we might change the will of God, and curry favor or win gifts by coaxing; the other, that prayer is offering God the opportunity to say to us, give to us, and do through us what he wills. Only the second is Christian.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, according to Fosdick, prayer actually does accomplish things; it has its objective results. It does not change God's intention, but it does change God's actions inasmuch as the prayer opens the way for God to act through man in the world.<sup>70</sup>

There is a second truth which Fosdick sees as lying at the base of intercessory prayer, that is, the intimate relationship of the world of persons. As Paul says, Christians are "members one of another." Recognizing the probability that mental telepathy is a reality and may then be analogous to the way prayer works in the world, Fosdick asserts that "there is no basis for denying the possibility that prayer may open ways of personal influence, even at a distance."<sup>71</sup> If one objects that this is simply a psychological influence that is being exerted from one person to another, Fosdick replies that "God has

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp. 65 f.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

so ordained psychological laws that vicarious praying by a group of earnest people does bring results."<sup>72</sup> This does not depreciate the value of intercessory prayer; rather it "gives to it the stability of a universal law."<sup>73</sup>

While our minds are insufficient for the task of seeing to its end the explanation of intercession's power, our experience is clear that something creative is being done when in this unitary system of personal life human souls take on themselves God's burden for men, and in vicarious prayer throw themselves in with his sacrificial purpose.<sup>74</sup>

Fosdick's realism comes out when he asserts that the final test of the reality of intercessory prayer lies in the practice of it.<sup>75</sup> The explanation of "prayer's projectile force"<sup>76</sup> is still a mystery, but men are certain of such prayers' influence. Fosdick cites as an example the prayer of a mother for her son. Not that she tries to persuade God to be good to her son; instead, she takes on God's burden as hers. She unites her desires with the divine desire. She joins God in "an urgent, creative outpouring of sacrificial love."<sup>77</sup> Fosdick hazards a guess that God has ordained the laws of human relationships so that "we can help one another not alone by our deeds, but

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Leininger, op. cit., pp. 45-50; cf. Fosdick, DMB, pp. 96-106. Note Fosdick's fine balancing of idealism and realism.

<sup>76</sup>Fosdick, MP, p. 183.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

also by our thoughts, and that earnest prayer may be the exercise of this power in its highest terms."<sup>78</sup>

Of course some petitions are not answered, and Fosdick deals with this question. There are three major reasons why petitions may not be answered: first because men ask in ignorance; in such case a "no" is a more kind answer than a "yes."<sup>79</sup> Again, some prayers are not answered because men try to make prayer a substitute for working and thinking. These three areas of working, thinking and praying are the chief ways in which men cooperate with God. None can take the place of the others. One should not expect to pray for and receive something that he could otherwise get by working or by thinking. The third reason for unanswered petitions is the fact that man is often unready to receive the gift that God would give. In such case the answer to the petitions may not be "no" or "yes," but rather "wait."<sup>80</sup>

Fosdick insists that even a "no" or a "wait" is an answer to prayer. For if God cannot answer positively the request of man, he can "answer the man." God answers prayers in one of two ways:

Either he changes the circumstances or he supplies sufficient power to overcome them.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 121-23.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

## Critique

Fosdick's personal struggle with the reality of prayer has made his book, The Meaning of Prayer, a classic for fifty years. He is to be commended for dealing realistically with man's reservation that prayer is simply a form of magic for getting what one wishes from God. In rebuttal, Fosdick chooses to define prayer in terms of receptivity--being open to God's will, being open to becoming a means for God's actions in this world. This writer finds himself strongly attracted to Fosdick's powerful presentation of the goodness and love of a God who eagerly awaits man's freely given acceptance of his aid. Again, Fosdick's emphasis on man's responsibility for his fellow man--a responsibility which includes prayer--is carefully presented and highly credible.

It is difficult to find fault with such a book. If there is a weakness, it lies in Fosdick's assertion of God's freedom to act in this world, to use the "laws" of the natural order to his own purposes. Fosdick is somewhat inconsistent, however, insofar as God's freedom to act is interpreted as being limited to action which is performed by a responsive individual who is open to God in prayer. As Leininger put it, "He has a bias, not in principle, but

in application, toward the limitation of God's freedom to act decisively within human affairs."<sup>82</sup>

### III. JOHN BURNABY

John Burnaby, the Regius Professor Emeritus of Divinity at Cambridge, has contributed an essay on the subject of "Christian Prayer" in Soundings,<sup>83</sup> a collection of essays which purportedly examines the questions which will face theologians in the nineteen-sixties.<sup>84</sup> It is more than significant that one of the eleven essays has to do with prayer.

#### Intercessory Prayer and Its Presuppositions

Burnaby believes that most thoughtful Christians are repelled by the crude idea of prayer as a force whose "power" may be harnessed if only the act is performed properly and by a sufficient number of people. On the other hand, modern man has not escaped the question raised as early as the third century--that is, does it

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<sup>82</sup>Leininger, op. cit., p. 268.

<sup>83</sup>John Burnaby, "Christian Prayer," Soundings: Essays Concerning Christian Understanding, A. R. Vidler, editor, pp. 219-37. Hereafter cited as "Prayer."

<sup>84</sup>A. R. Vidler, "Introduction," Soundings: Essays Concerning Christian Understanding, A. R. Vidler, editor, p. xi.

really matter whether one prays or not?<sup>85</sup> The Christian may not retreat into the realm of "mystical" prayer--as opposed to "prophetic"<sup>86</sup>--even though mystical prayer seems to be both universal and less open to criticism.<sup>87</sup> While Christian prayer is a communion, it is a communion with God which involves petition. The recorded teaching of Christ assumes that to pray is to ask God for one's needs. The same is true in the early Church.<sup>88</sup>

The New Testament also reveals a new understanding of God's relationship to man, a relationship based on love and response, not coercion. The necessary corollary of such an understanding is genuine human freedom and moral responsibility within the stable world order which man has learned to take for granted.<sup>89</sup>

[Modern man] will be disposed to think that if God has given us both freedom and the means of controlling

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<sup>85</sup>Burnaby, "Prayer," pp. 224 f. Burnaby cites Origen's Treatise "On Prayer" as dealing with questions "prompted by the apparent inconsistency between accepted Christian practice and certain a priori notions about God and man." For example, how is petition to be reconciled with the belief in God's omniscient providence? Why voice one's desires in the material realm if it is assumed that the only real "good" is found in the realm of the spirit?

<sup>86</sup>Cf. Heiler, Prayer, passim.

<sup>87</sup>Burnaby, "Prayer," pp. 221-22. Mystical prayer does not look for changes in the external world.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., pp. 223-24.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

our environment, he intends us to use both. Yet he will find in the Church's prayers what seems to be a disavowal of this freedom, and an appeal to God to replace it by action of his own.<sup>90</sup>

Faced with this problem, the Christian is tempted to regard prayer as simply a reflexive action, as if the act of asking to be made better is a sufficient explanation of any improvement which results from prayer. Such a view, however, does not ultimately require God at all. Nor does it account for the Christian belief that prayer for others results in their betterment. Burnaby discounts extra-sensory perception as an explanation of intercessory prayer; even if telepathy is a reality, the Christian who prays will insist that "he is not trying to 'get in touch' with the person for whom he intercedes, but asking God to act for that person's good."<sup>91</sup>

We cannot 'explain' intercession by telepathy, any more than we can 'explain' prayer for ourselves by autosuggestion; for the heart of all Christian prayer is faith in God.<sup>92</sup>

Unlike Harkness and Fosdick, Burnaby does not begin with a certain presupposition about God's providential relationship with the natural order, but his starting point is the meaning of the Incarnation. The problem of prayer,

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 227. Emphasis mine.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

says Burnaby, stems from a misunderstanding about Jesus Christ as the revelation of God and the relationship of that revelation to man's understanding of human life.<sup>93</sup> The Jewish understanding of the difference between the Creator and the created was overcome, said the Church, in the fact that "God was in Christ." This conviction of the God-Manhood of Jesus was a result of the Church's experience of the Holy Spirit, an experience which was bound up with a belief in Jesus Christ. "The Church found God in Christ because it had already found God present in its own life."<sup>94</sup>

A theology of prayer must, then, be grounded on the nature of the Gospel, the significance of which is that God has done away with the 'apartness' between God and man.<sup>95</sup> Just as salvation has been manifest by God through the freely willed obedience of Jesus Christ, so

God's kingdom must come on earth through the operation of human wills which by the acceptance of the Spirit of Jesus have become one with the will of God. Prayer, then, will be the means of affirming and confirming this unity.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 229. "The Johannine theology of incarnation--the Word became flesh--does no more than draw out the implications of Pentecost."

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 230. Emphasis mine.

The "will of God" has nothing to do with an unbiblical understanding of omnipotence but with God's desire to unite men to himself in the freedom of love. "The power of God is the power of love."<sup>97</sup> The Christian disciple is called to share in God's "labour of love"; he is called to pray, both for himself and for his neighbor, for the increase of love.<sup>98</sup>

The Christian does not pray with the idea that God is the source of actions which are superior to the forces of nature and the acts which are brought into being by the wills of men.<sup>99</sup> Rather, the Christian asserts that the Kingdom of God comes into human history through the "power of love" as that love takes effect "through the wills and actions of men in whom that love has come to dwell."<sup>100</sup> Prayer is the opening of the heart to the invasion of the love of God. But this invasion is not limited to the improved spiritual condition of the one praying, for the

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<sup>97</sup>John Burnaby, The Belief of Christendom: A Commentary on the Nicene Creed, p. 31. If man asserts the omnipotence of God, he asserts the faith that God's love, his self-giving goodness, cannot always be defeated.

<sup>98</sup>Burnaby, "Prayer," p. 231.

<sup>99</sup>Burnaby feels (ibid., p. 232) that to speak of prayer as something which makes up for man's own deficiency in wisdom or power leaves one open to the problem of unanswered prayer. Why does God seem so impotent?

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

birth of divine love in the human may not be contained.

The life that is released in the soul that has consented to the wooing of God's grace is no longer a life of the soul, but the life and power of its union with God. And by that union the universal working of the love of God has increase.<sup>101</sup>

Whether this increase of love will result in an answer to his particular petition man may not be sure.<sup>102</sup> Rather than thinking of prayer in terms of "answered" or "not answered," the Christian will think of prayer in terms of serving God.

### Critique

When all has been said, Burnaby's understanding of intercessory prayer makes such prayer merely a part of the individual's relationship with God. The prayer of intercession changes the one praying, makes him more loving, and thus affects the world by adding to the stock of love in the world.

This understanding of the meaning of prayer is consistent with Burnaby's understanding of the relationship of God to his creation. While not absolutely ruling out the

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Burnaby says that Christians should continue to pray for health and peace--"not doubting that God wills our health and the world's peace, not knowing whether, things being as they are, he is able to give us either"--sure only that prayer is an embodiment, however feeble, of love, and thus "prayer makes a difference" (ibid., p. 234).

possibility of miracles in the sense of "breaches in the natural order never to be naturally explained," Burnaby finds it more fitting to view nature as expressing the unity and constancy of the one who created it. This natural order, the goodness of which has not been changed, is "capable of acting as instrument of [God's] redemptive purpose, in spite of the sin and unbelief of man."<sup>103</sup>

Miracles would then be understood as "signs" that

the God of nature is not indifferent to the affairs of men, that he is a present help in Trouble, and that in this particular emergency he is acting in accordance with his unchanging goodness and mercy.<sup>104</sup>

It is superfluous to point out that Burnaby is correct in asserting the role of man as part of God's answer to prayer. The picture of the heart which has been invaded by the love of God as one which adds to the increase of love in the world is a compelling one. Nevertheless, Burnaby has capitulated to the scientist. God is a prisoner of his own creation; all that the world order can do is express God's unchanging goodness. But God himself is powerless except as men exercise their wills in expressing divine "love" in their lives. The God of Deism has been resurrected!

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<sup>103</sup>Burnaby, The Belief in Christendom, pp. 32-33; cf. John Burnaby, Is the Bible Inspired?, pp. 113-16.

<sup>104</sup>Burnaby, The Belief in Christendom, p. 33.

## CHAPTER VI

### PRAYER IS REDEFINED IN TERMS OF ETHICAL ACTION

The survey of twentieth century Protestantism's understanding of the function of intercessory prayer has now come full circle. The opposite extreme of those who understand prayer as actually adding something to God or to the situation in which he is believed to act is the position of those who abandon--or seem to--the act of prayer altogether or redefine prayer in terms of ethical action.

Such a radical change in the traditional understanding of prayer has emerged with the radical revolution in theology in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Three representatives from the theological "left" indicate the extent to which the practice of prayer has fallen into disrepute. John A. T. Robinson and Douglas Rhymes seek to reinterpret the idea of God and the meaning of prayer for the secular man who is unable to accept the Biblical world view. Paul van Buren, on the other hand, uses linguistic criticism to

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<sup>1</sup>For a review of the new theological situation, cf. William Hordern, New Directions in Theology Today, Volume I: Introduction; Thomas W. Ogletree, The Death of God Controversy; John Macquarrie, New Directions in Theology Today, Volume III: God and Secularity; and others.

ask the more radical question of the meaningfulness of any statement of the Christian faith.<sup>2</sup>

## I. JOHN A. T. ROBINSON AND DOUGLAS RHYMES

### John A. T. Robinson

In March, 1963, John A. T. Robinson created a great deal of popular interest in the subject of theology when he bared his soul and expressed his concern over how the Christian faith was to be interpreted in the modern world.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Honest to God became an immediate best-seller. The book shall not be examined in detail here,<sup>4</sup> but a quick survey is needed if Robinson's view of prayer is to be seen in perspective.

Robinson has actually done little more than popularize some of the thoughts of Rudolf Bultmann, Paul

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<sup>2</sup>Frederick Herzog, Understanding God: The Key Issue in Present-Day Protestant Thought, pp. 16, 24, says that van Buren, unlike Robinson, is not interested in interpreting Christianity to the unbeliever, but is questioning the faith itself.

<sup>3</sup>That this was not a new concern may be seen by examining his earlier books: In the End, God; On Being the Church in the World; and Liturgy Coming to Life.

<sup>4</sup>Discussion of the book and the resulting debate may be found in the various reviews of Honest to God and in David L. Edwards (ed.), The Honest to God Debate.

Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>5</sup> Like Bultmann, Robinson feels that the form in which the Gospel is presented is a stumbling block to modern man. Even the shift from a God who is physically "up there" to one who is spiritually "out there" has not solved the problem.<sup>6</sup> Now, says Robinson, man must understand God not as a separate entity but as the "ground of being."<sup>7</sup> He agrees with Bonhoeffer that the "religious" understanding of God--God as a deus ex machina--is out, but at the same time he wishes to preserve the transcendence of God.<sup>8</sup>

Statements about God are acknowledgments of the transcendent, unconditional element in all our relationships, and supremely in our relationship with other persons.<sup>9</sup>

God, then, is found and known only as man encounters and responds to the claims of his neighbor. The prophetic tradition of the Bible insists that "God, since he is Love, is encountered in his fullness only 'between man and man.'"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God, pp. 21-24; hereafter cited as Honest. Cf. also John A. T. Robinson, Exploration into God, pp. 16-20; hereafter cited as Exploration.

<sup>6</sup>Robinson, Honest, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 29 ff., 45 ff. Here, of course, Robinson is indebted to Tillich.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 36 f., 44.      <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 60; cf. Jer. 22:15 f.

God is to be met not by a 'religious' turning away from the world but in unconditional concern for 'the other' seen through to its ultimate depths.<sup>11</sup>

What, then, is the place of prayer and worship in "religionless" Christianity?<sup>12</sup> Robinson thinks that the purpose of worship is to

open oneself to the meeting of Christ in the common; . . . to purify and correct our loves in 'the light of Christ's love; and in him' to find the grace and power to be the reconciled and reconciling community.<sup>13</sup>

Prayer also must be "non-religious" inasmuch as it "transcends the improper dichotomy between the sacred and the secular."<sup>14</sup> Prayer is to be "engagement" with the world rather than "disengagement" from the world in order to "be with God," as traditional piety assumes.<sup>15</sup> Though Robinson does not deny the value of and necessity for withdrawal,<sup>16</sup> he does say that such prayer is not for

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> "Religious" is used here in the customary sense--with which Robinson does not agree--as the "antithesis of the 'secular.'" It has to do with the activities which take place "apart" from the world, in the domain of the sanctuary. Ibid., pp. 84 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 87-88.

<sup>14</sup> David L. Mueller, "Review of Honest to God," Review and Expositor, LXI, No. 3 (Summer, 1964), 241.

<sup>15</sup> Robinson, Honest, pp. 91 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

every man, nor is it the heart of prayer.<sup>17</sup> Prayer is defined, in the light of the Incarnation, as "penetration through the world to God rather than . . . withdrawal from the world to God."<sup>18</sup> Christian teaching concerning prayer must begin by taking the world and history "seriously as the locus of the incarnation."<sup>19</sup> Intercession is opening oneself to another in love, and it is "openness to the ground of our being."<sup>20</sup>

To pray for another is to expose both oneself and him to the common ground of our being; it is to see one's concern for him in terms of ultimate concern, to let God into the relationship. Intercession is to be with another at that depth, whether in silence or compassion or action.<sup>21</sup>

Prayer is the responsibility to meet others with all I have, to be ready to encounter the unconditional in the conditional, to expect to meet God in the way, not to turn aside from the way.<sup>22</sup>

There is, of course, the "dialectic of engagement and withdrawal," but the engagement is primary. The Christian does not have to withdraw from the world to meet God, but he does have to go into the world in love if he is

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 92 f. Robinson cites with approval George Macleod's statement in Only One Way Left (pp. 159 f.) that modern prayer can no longer be interpreted and practiced according to a medieval pattern.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 97. Emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

to meet the God of love.<sup>23</sup> Prayer in the traditional sense is not negated, it is just made secondary. Rather than setting aside specific times ("spaces") for prayer, one should wait for the kairos, the compulsion to pray which drives a man to his knees.<sup>24</sup>

In a later book, Exploration into God, Robinson has added to the study of prayer begun in Honest to God. Prayer, he says, has to do not only with personal relationships, "but with response to all reality as Thou."<sup>25</sup> Worship is seeing God in all creation and all creation in God.

Anything that discloses, or penetrates through to this level of reality, whether corporately or in solitude, whether in talk or action or silence, is prayer.<sup>26</sup>

Because ultimate reality is expressed as personal, it is natural for man to express the reality of God as the "claim of another Person." The "description of God as a Person" is legitimate as a myth, as an aid to man's imagination;<sup>27</sup> the danger is that this theistic projection encourages "personalistic interventionist" conceptions of divine activity in nature and history. Instead of

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-104.

<sup>25</sup>Robinson, Exploration, p. 122.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 122 f.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

envisioning God as manipulating the processes of nature from the outside,

what we need is a conception of prayer that organically relates the processes themselves to the depths of the divine creativity and love.<sup>28</sup>

Robinson commends the new forms of contemporary spirituality--for example, Malcolm Boyd's Are You Running with Me, Jesus?--with its conversational tone and the assumption that God is to be met in, not apart from, the world. The strength of such prayer is that it is personal, it knows God as Thou, but "its weakness is that it is often artificially personalistic--envisaging God as a separate Thou."<sup>29</sup>

#### Douglas Rhymes

The revolution touched off by Robinson's Honest to God has been followed by increased interest not only in the question of the reality of God but also the place of the Christian faith in a secular society.<sup>30</sup> Douglas Rhymes, Director of Southwark Cathedral College for Training Laymen, has elaborated upon the formulation laid by John A. T. Robinson in his treatment of prayer in a secular

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>30</sup>Thus the title of John Macquarrie's book, God and Secularity. Cf. also Harvey Cox, The Secular City; R. Gregor Smith, Secular Christianity; Eric L. Mascall, The Secularization of the Gospel; and others.

society, Prayer in the Secular City.<sup>31</sup> Like Robinson, Rhymes takes as his starting point Bonhoeffer's question: "What is the place of prayer and worship in an entire absence of religion?"<sup>32</sup> That is, what kind of prayer has relevance and meaning for a man of the twentieth century?

Rhymes cites three broad reasons for secular man's difficulty with prayer: first, the characteristics of the secular age; second, confusion about the meaning of the word "God"; third, the tendency to limit prayer to special times and special places.<sup>33</sup>

The characteristics of the modern age are a pragmatic outlook, an existentialist concern with man's concrete human existence in the present age, increasing mobility and lack of quiet, a tendency towards greater anonymity, and an increasing awareness of the problem of loneliness coupled with the effort to find in small groups the personal

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<sup>31</sup>Cited hereafter as Prayer.

<sup>32</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 92. Cited in Robinson, Honest, p. 84, and Rhymes, Prayer, p. 9. It is questionable whether Bonhoeffer would support the reinterpretation of prayer which Rhymes manages. Passages in Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison (pp. 130 f., 142) indicate a belief that God does act in answer to prayer, while his little book, Life Together (pp. 82 ff.), points out the need for periods of quiet when the Christian prays, intercedes and meditates on Scripture.

<sup>33</sup>Rhymes, Prayer, p. 11.

relationships and community which are lacking in the ordinary world.<sup>34</sup> A "relevant spirituality"--this includes prayer--for this age will be one which speaks pragmatically to the questions of day-to-day life. It will relate the authentic existence of man to reality and truth in the present moment. It will accept the "sociological circumstances" of mobility, pressure, and lack of privacy. It will be concerned with personal experience and the community life of small groups.<sup>35</sup>

The debate about God also affects what one thinks of prayer. All depends on whether man speaks of God as a being that is a person, or as Being itself which is personal.

We can speak of talking to God if God is a being, or a person; it is very difficult to see how we can speak in any realistic sense of prayer as talking to God if we think of God as being, . . . for how can you talk to being, to ultimate reality, to the personal rather than to a person?<sup>36</sup>

Rhymes seems to favor the position of radical theology which doubts the "possibility of the concept of God as a separate person."<sup>37</sup> Personality is not a concept limited to God as an individual, rather it is the "nature of that ultimate reality . . . which we understand through

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-19.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

our own experiences of the purest kind of personal relationships." The result of this is that

prayer to a God who is personal becomes, not so much a talking to a person, as the expression of a quality of life in which the personal is being lived out in human relationships.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the difficulty with prayer in a secular society is caused by limiting the term prayer to "talking to God" and by narrowing the concept of prayer to that which is done in retreat from the world--at set places and at set times.<sup>39</sup> Prayer-life is thus separated from ordinary life. To correct this, says Rhymes, prayer should not be defined as talking to God, but "seeking to do the will of God." Training in prayer should involve instruction in knowing and responding to the will of God rather than learning how to talk to God.<sup>40</sup>

Rhymes proposes a fourfold method of modern prayer which will be an interaction of "reflection" and "living."<sup>41</sup> There is first the need for reflection (contemplation) on the whole meaning of who men are and what they do. Rhymes uses the traditional terms of mystical thought to describe the three stages of reflection: the Purgative is the discovery of the "reality which is myself"; the Illuminative

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 24; cf. p. 52.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 27 f.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

is the thoughtful examination of coming events and activities; the Unitive experience is the goal toward which one strives, the moment when one is "engaged with the world in a living union with the will of God for the world."<sup>42</sup>

Second, there is the need to carry spirituality into the world in involvement. To the objection that this is Christian living, not prayer, Rhymes answers that there is no distinction. "What makes it prayer is that it is Christian living consciously thought out and consciously motivated for Christ's sake."<sup>43</sup> Third, there will be the need for an asceticism--a modern version of fasting--which is appropriate to the Church's witness of the costliness of love in a secular world.<sup>44</sup> Finally, a relevant spirituality will consider the need for and contributions of the small religious community as a means of finding meaning and wholeness in a fragmented society.<sup>45</sup>

The authority for such a view of prayer is found in an interpretation of the life of Christ, for Christ's prayer-life is seen as alternating between withdrawal and

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-58, 46 f.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 48-49; cf. pp. 58-73.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-50, 73-80.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 50 f., 80-83.

involvement.<sup>46</sup> Rhymes will not allow that Christ actually talked to God. Rather, the periods of withdrawal were for contemplation and struggling with what the will of God was for him. Just so, modern man needs periods of solitude when he reflects on what God is doing in history, the meaning of man's existence and the cost of becoming part of God's action.<sup>47</sup> The other half of Christ's prayer life is man's also--that is, "involvement." Christ's teaching, healing and forgiving was "prayer," for in everything he did, he was "meeting people with the truth," helping them become conscious of their true selves.<sup>48</sup> Prayer in the life of Christ--and the life of every man--is redefined as:

the searching out of God in the human situation, which means the searching out of what truly is, of what truly is eternal in the human situation.<sup>49</sup>

In like manner, the Lord's Prayer is redefined to fit Rhymes's understanding of prayer. It is not, he insists, a prayer of words. The Lord's Prayer is a saying which expresses "how the reality of life is found."<sup>50</sup> To hallow the name of the heavenly Father really means to

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 30 ff.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 31-33. Rhymes seems a bit inconsistent inasmuch as he wishes to deny the reality of God as a being, yet continues to speak of what "God is doing" and what "God wills."

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 33 f.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

hallow or revere the being of which God is the ground; it is to see God in all creation and erase the distinction between secular and sacred.<sup>51</sup> "Thy kingdom come" expresses hope for the ultimate evolution of the universe to the point already achieved by Jesus Christ--that is, all things will be obedient to God. The Church has the responsibility of working out the meaning of that kingdom within the secular city. Thus, "thy will be done" expresses the desire to accomplish God's will in all of life. This will is the universal rule of love as it is known in the person of Christ, understood and expressed by small groups within the church who together discover the will of God in their situation.<sup>52</sup> The essentials of the Church's mission--that is, obedience to the will of God in this world--are expressed in the last three petitions of the Lord Prayer. They are not really petitions, however; they are expression of our responsibility to serve the needs of men (daily bread), to accept other men as they are (forgiveness), and to avoid temptation by having a realism about ourselves and the world.<sup>53</sup> These "petitions" express the communal perspective of the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer does not involve a

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-37.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-39.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-43.

"pietistic individualism," but "an experience of living which I primarily find in and through others."<sup>54</sup>

Thus, Rhymes wishes to discard the view of prayer as speaking to another person in order to define prayer as the "in-Christness which lights up all our actions in daily living from within."<sup>55</sup> Any verbalizing in prayer will not be in the form of address, but will be

words which express the identification of God both with myself and with the situation, which expresses the experience of the recognition of where God is and where He is not.<sup>56</sup>

Corporate prayer and worship are still relevant, for they express "in a community action the corporate nature of all reality."<sup>57</sup> As Rhymes himself sums up:

I do not believe there is a proper separation between life and prayer. I believe that all life is response to God. . . . If we from time to time withdraw, it is only that we may have time to reflect on what our response should be. To affirm God in every circumstance of life, and to affirm God because God is the reality behind all life . . . : that to me is prayer.<sup>58</sup>

### Critique

Both Robinson and Rhymes have faced honestly and

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 44.      <sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 84.      <sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 101. Rhymes treats rather carefully the form and content of relevant corporate prayer (ibid., pp. 101-17) and gives examples of some unusual experiments in worship (ibid., pp. 120-38).

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

realistically modern man's difficulty with prayer. Many will feel a burden of guilt removed when they discover that there are devout men for whom prayer is not always meaningful. Both men have tried to remove the tyranny of devotional practices whose nature was determined in the Middle Ages.<sup>59</sup> Again, both Robinson and Rhymes have clearly demonstrated that prayer and living cannot be separated, for spirituality is not a matter of simply retreating from the world into the seclusion of closet or sanctuary.

One wonders, however, if Robinson and Rhymes have created a false dilemma. The testimony of the Church is that men have had genuine encounters with God in the quietness of withdrawal. While one would not deny Robinson's "incarnational" principle that God is known in and through the material order,<sup>60</sup> could one not also say that much of man's meaningful encounter with the world is the result of a prior encounter with God in prayer?

Both Robinson and Rhymes ultimately end up redefining prayer as man's responsible, open, loving interaction with his neighbor. Unlike Rhymes, Robinson does appear to allow for some private communication between man

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<sup>59</sup>That is, prayer is largely a matter of retreat and contemplation.

<sup>60</sup>Robinson, Honest, p. 97.

and God, but the main thrust is clear. The reason for this lies in the doctrine of God accepted by the two men. That debate will not be entered into here<sup>61</sup> except to point out that prayer in the traditional sense is almost impossible when God is defined as the ground of being or Being itself.<sup>62</sup> The affirmation of transcendence only within personal relationships or history is not sufficient to support prayer in terms of a communion with God. It is interesting that Rhymes, in particular, cannot escape the use of personal terminology when speaking of God--for example, the "will of God"--even though he wishes to deny the reality of God as a personal being.

Have these writers, particularly Rhymes, been fair in their use of biblical material? To interpret Jesus' prayer-life as merely the combination of contemplation and action is to misrepresent the New Testament writers who reported that he talked (or thought he did) to God his Father. These men may deny, if they wish, any transcendent dimension to God, but it is unjust to force this interpretation on the Bible.

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<sup>61</sup>Cf. Edwards (ed.), The Honest to God Debate, pp. 194-206; Herzog, Understanding God, pp. 18-21; Martín Marty, "The Bishop and the Debate," The Christian Century, LXXXI, No. 26 (June 24, 1964), 830-32.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Rhymes, Prayer, p. 21.

Finally, one may ask if Robinson and Rhymes have been consistent in viewing private prayer as essentially irrelevant and yet attempting (as Rhymes does) to hold on to the practice of public prayer. If prayer is to be redefined as ethical action and the verbalizing of prayer is simply the expression of one's commitment, why pretend to continue the religious practice of prayer? How far may one go in redefining terms before intelligent discussion becomes lost in a sea of linguistic qualifications? When the transcendent dimension has gone and prayer is seen as one's openness to his fellow man, there seems to be little to distinguish Christian prayer from the "prayer" of a responsible atheist.

## II. PAUL VAN BUREN

William Hamilton has made a useful distinction between the two schools of "religionless" Christianity. On the one hand, there are the moderate "religionless" theologians--such as John A. T. Robinson--for whom "religion" means religious activities such as going to church and saying one's prayers. To be "religionless" for these people is to say that these activities may perhaps have to be dropped or changed and radical experiments must be made in the forms of the Church in order to make the ministry of the Church relevant to our world. On the other hand,

there is the more radical type of religionless Christianity --a type with which William Hamilton would identify himself. This type sees no need for the religious a priori, that is, its advocates see no need for bringing God into the picture at all.<sup>63</sup> It is with the latter that Paul van Buren has the most affinity.<sup>64</sup>

### Presuppositions

Van Buren's understanding of prayer<sup>65</sup> must be examined in light of his acceptance of the principles of functional analysis or logical empiricism.<sup>66</sup> Van Buren adopts a modified verification principle,<sup>67</sup> and as a result he rejects any cognitive approach to theological language; as does R. B. Braithwaite, van Buren understands the meaning of a statement by the way it is used.<sup>68</sup> As van Buren

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<sup>63</sup>William Hamilton, "The Death of God Theologies Today," Radical Theology and the Death of God, Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, editors, pp. 39-40.

<sup>64</sup>Cf. Macquarrie, God and Secularity, p. 22.

<sup>65</sup>Paul van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, pp. 188-90. Hereafter cited as Secular Meaning.

<sup>66</sup>Cf. James Richmond, Faith and Philosophy, pp. 192, 198 f.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 184 f. The modified verification principle means that a statement may be valid even if it is not a definition or an empirically verifiable statement. The result is a multiplicity of "language games," each with its own "logic" or use (ibid., pp. 198-99).

puts it, "the language of faith has meaning when it is taken to refer to the Christian way of life; it is not a set of cosmological assertions."<sup>69</sup> Van Buren reduces Christian theology to such an extent by this verification principle that God himself is left out of the picture altogether-- much as in the systems of Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton. The only thing that remains of the Christian faith is an uncertain emphasis on Jesus Christ as the paradigm of human existence, a man who attained true freedom and whose freedom has become "contagious" for his disciples.<sup>70</sup>

#### The "Logic" of Prayer

Van Buren admits that the language of prayer is the language of address. Empirical, secular man wishes to know, however, who this someone is who is addressed in prayer. Since this is not empirically testable, van Buren wishes to look in another direction for a secular meaning of prayer. He notes that when ancient man prayed for his neighbor--for example, for rain for his neighbor's field, he was trying to help his neighbor. In this case, the only

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<sup>69</sup>Van Buren, Secular Meaning, p. 101.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 133. Cf. Langdon B. Gilkey, "A New Linguistic Madness," New Theology No. 2, Martin Marty and Dean Peerman, editors, p. 45, for the problems involved in the use of the concept of "contagion."

thing he knew to do was to invoke God's help and power in the situation. This, then, was the "use," the "logic," the "meaning" of prayer. In today's world the Christian will do the same thing as he prays. He will first reflect on his neighbor's needs in light of the Gospel and then, because he has been set free in Jesus Christ to be concerned about his neighbor, he will "set about doing just what ancient man was doing: the most effective thing he knows of to relieve his neighbor's distress."<sup>71</sup> He will try to help his neighbor; and if he is unable to do so, he will stand by the neighbor despite the "unanswered prayer."

Thus, for van Buren,

The meaning of intercessory prayer is its use: it begins in reflection upon the situation in the light of the Christian perspective and leads to appropriate action.<sup>72</sup>

In his book, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel,<sup>73</sup> van Buren seems to recognize a certain value in the corporate experience of worship in the Church--experiences such as baptism, preaching, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. However, in an interview with Ved Mehta<sup>74</sup> van Buren makes it clear that he has now come to the point where he no

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<sup>71</sup>Van Buren, Secular Meaning, pp. 188-89.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 189.                      <sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 183-90.

<sup>74</sup>Ved Mehta, The New Theologian, p. 65.

longer attaches any value to prayer and, in fact, no longer exercises the Christian ministry to which he had been ordained. As John Macquarrie puts it, "such consequences seem to follow inevitably from his book."<sup>75</sup>

### Critique

Like Robinson and Rhymes, van Buren has redefined prayer in terms of ethical action, though he would insist that it is still Christian ethical action inasmuch as "reflection" on a situation means examining it in light of one's historical perspective--which is found in the Bible.<sup>76</sup> Prayer in the traditional sense is obviously impossible if one begins with van Buren's presupposition that the word "God" can refer only to the 'value' which we ascribe to the experience of love which men encounter in the person of Jesus.<sup>77</sup>

[The Gospel] claims that in the history of Jesus of Nazareth something universal, eternal, absolute, something it calls "God" was manifested.<sup>78</sup>

Van Buren's view of prayer is subject to two basic criticisms--both of which apply to his system as a whole.

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<sup>75</sup>Macquarrie, God and Secularity, p. 23.

<sup>76</sup>Van Buren, Secular Meaning, p. 189.

<sup>77</sup>Cf. Herzog, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>78</sup>Van Buren, Secular Meaning, p. 139.

First, van Buren uncritically accepts the dogmatic presupposition of linguistic analysis that a statement has meaning only insofar as it is empirically testable or logical, or its "use" is known. Such a position reduces the Christian faith to the point of transforming it. Van Buren has not answered the objections of those who insist that religious knowledge must not be measured by a false view of scientific knowledge when in actual fact both are forms of "personal knowledge." The verification of religious knowledge is not to be tested empirically but by its inner consistency and its ability "to illuminate and make intelligible the whole of experience."<sup>79</sup>

Second, van Buren is uncritical in his use of the biblical testimony inasmuch as he assumes that the "logic" of biblical man at prayer is identical with the "logic" acceptable to van Buren's secular man. Langdon Gilkey has called this attempt to substitute the actual historical usage of the biblical and patristic writers with what van Buren understands as their true intention a new "linguistic madness."<sup>80</sup> The fact is that biblical prayer

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<sup>79</sup>Eric C. Rust, Science and Faith: Towards a Theological Understanding of Nature, p. 130. Surveys of the problems involved in linguistic analysis may be found in Rust, ibid., pp. 109-27; Richmond, op. cit., pp. 177-22; and William T. Blackstone, The Problem of Religious Knowledge: The Impact of Philosophical Analysis on the Question of Religious Knowledge.

<sup>80</sup>Gilkey, op. cit., pp. 48 f.

was not simply an expression of the desire to help, rather prayer was conceived as an actual address to someone--a concept which van Buren's empiricism will not let him accept.<sup>81</sup>

It may be that van Buren's secular man is right in his rejection of the traditional concept of prayer, though this writer thinks there are good arguments to the contrary, but one should not confuse the "logic" of biblical language with the "logic" of van Buren's "own contemporary secular understanding of the Gospel."<sup>82</sup> Prayer simply may not be redefined so radically and still allow the term to retain any logical significance.

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<sup>81</sup>A similar view is expressed by D. Z. Phillips in The Concept of Prayer, pp. 112-30. Phillips distinguishes what he calls magical petition (or "incantation") from truly religious petition; the latter, he says, is expressed in terms of asking God for something. Actually, however, it expresses the believer's anxiety that things are beyond his control and he therefore desires a relationship with God to sustain him whatever happens.

The above is, of course, a genuine aspect of petition--but can one so easily dismiss the fact that even the most religiously astute men actually address themselves to God with the hope of achieving their desires? Phillips, then, justifies the "form" of petition, but not the content; actual asking is, for him, sheer magic.

<sup>82</sup>Gilkey, op. cit., p. 149.

## CONCLUSION TO PART TWO

With the foregoing chapters in mind, a brief resumé of the four attitudes toward petition and intercession may be attempted. Two basic questions must be asked of each general approach: Can God act in his created order? Does God act in his created order in answer to man's petitions? Following these questions this section will consider some of the basic strengths and weaknesses of each of the four major approaches which have been described.

### Can God Act?

The question of God's ability to act freely and creatively within his own established order is absolutely crucial to an effective belief in intercessory prayer. A positive answer to this question has been given by the writers represented in Chapters III and IV. Neither those who assert the freedom of God to respond to man's petitions (Buttrick and Farmer) nor those whose emphasis is on the sovereignty of God's will (Barth and Rice) would admit any claim which makes the model of natural law absolutely supreme.

The more subjective view which is treated in Chapter V is not quite so clear as to God's freedom to move freely within the created order. Here the tendency is to regard the regularity of the universe as the expression of

God's goodness and sustaining providence. Hence man cannot expect the universe to be altered just because he wishes to have it so; the world as it is now is best suited to God's overriding design for man. Any subsequent action of God in the world is described largely in terms of his response to man's openness to God in prayer. The changed situation resulting from the act of prayer allows God to do things he could not otherwise do.<sup>1</sup> With regard to intercession, prayer is regarded as the means by which God's power, love and sympathetic insight are brought to bear on another individual for whom prayer is made. The basic attitude is summed up in the little poem which begins, "God has no hands but our hands."

For the secular-oriented thinkers in Chapter VI there is little or no mention of God's freedom to act in the created order. The question is dismissed by saying that the issue is irrelevant for modern man (Robinson and Rhymes) or that it is illegitimate to speak of God at all (van Buren).

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<sup>1</sup>An often cited human parallel is the situation of a father who wishes to give his son a college education but who cannot until the boy shows enough interest in further education to come to his father and ask to be sent to college. Cf. Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Meaning of Prayer, pp. 63-64.

### Does God Act?

A second major issue is whether God can be said to act in this world in response to man's desires. Does God take man's will into account? Do prayers have some determinative effect on God's actions?

Again the answer from Farmer and Buttrick (Chapter III) is positive. God can and does take man into account in the providential ordering of the universe. There is a somewhat limited positive answer which is given by the more subjectively oriented thinkers of Chapter V. God does respond to prayer, but the change in God's actions is not to be conceived primarily in terms of divine manipulation of the natural order but a changed relationship between God and the one praying.

A negative view of God's willingness to take man's desires into account is found in the writers treated in Chapters IV and VI. In the first case it is because of an emphasis on the divine sovereignty; in the second it is because the very person of God is questioned or ignored as irrelevant.

Although all the above writers are concerned primarily with the general question of the possibility of God's acting freely and dynamically in the world process, they deal indirectly with the related question of the relationship of prayer to the Christian yearning for the

reconciliation of the world to God. The issue is the same whether one speaks of God's relationship to the world at the material level or the mental level, that is, will God act in such and such a way because man prays?

Those who emphasize God's willingness to take man's prayer into account assert that, with all due respect for man's freedom, God does work in a special way in a man's life because another has prayed. Those whose emphasis is on the sovereignty of God also pray, but here the accent is on God's prior election of all men (Barth) or God's revealed willingness to save all who depend upon Christ for salvation (Rice); there is not much question of God's changing his will because of man's prayer. Those whose stress is on the pray-er as God's means of answering intercessory prayers naturally understand reconciliation in terms of man's response to the love of God which is revealed in and through the changed lives of Christians. The radical writers represented in Chapter VI would also emphasize the role of the individual in bringing about reconciliation in the life of others--but here it is more a matter of social redemption rather than a man-God reconciliation.

### Strengths and Weaknesses

Chapter III: prayer affects God's action. The basic strength of this general position is its strong sense of a

personal God; this experience of the personal at the heart of the world prevents any idea that God can be manipulated (as Farmer said, God is experienced as Demand as well as Succour) or that God is unresponsive to man's needs. For both Buttrick and Farmer "natural law" is not determinative in the world; rather natural law is the mathematical expression of God's gracious sustaining of a dependable natural order.

The basic weakness of this approach is specifically within the problem raised by intercessory prayer. There is little attempt made to reconcile the thought of a personal God who has the well-being of man as his primary objective with the idea that God's own actions on behalf of other men are conditioned by the Christian's prayers. The latter implies a conditional or imperfect concern on the part of God.

Chapter IV: prayer is aligning oneself with the will of God. The basic strength of this position lies in its assertion of the sovereignty of God who graciously allows man to participate with him in the governing of the universe by means of prayer. Such an emphasis means that there can be no manipulation of God: man's all too imperfect prayers are subject to God's approval, and man can rest confidently in the wisdom of God's decision. The stress on sovereignty

means that man can never doubt that God is able to exercise a personal role in the ongoing life of the world.

But the emphasis on the sovereignty of God also becomes the basic weakness as well as strength of this position. In a word, man's prayers are always subject to God's prior will; thus man is deprived of an effective selfhood before God. This point is made more explicitly in Rice than in Barth. To use a political analogy, man "rubberstamps" God's decrees--and thus participates in them, but man has no actual voice in establishing the content of those decrees.

Chapter V: the answer to prayer is primarily subjective. The basic strength of this position lies in its consistency with the whole of the Christian faith: it affirms God's freedom to act; it emphasizes the personal responsibility that is man's in confrontation with God; it proclaims God's constant graciousness and goodness; it does not ignore man's role as a social being who is responsible (with God's help) for his fellow man. The objective results of intercession are affirmed in situations where man may become an instrument of God's grace. The account of prayer given by such writers as Fosdick and Harkness is warm, vital, and, to a large extent, intellectually satisfying.

The basic weakness of the subjective position lies

in the emphasis on God's working through the natural order of things to the point that this is regarded as the "best of all possible worlds." Is it so easy to say that the universe as it is expresses God's perfect will in every way, or is the truth really that the world is still incomplete? To limit the realm of God's effective action to the subjective realm on the grounds that there is no need to alter the perfection of the divine working within nature results in an "immanent Deism" which affirms God's directing activity in the world but which is reluctant to allow God the freedom to alter the regular pattern which has been established.

Another result of the above weakness is, as H. H. Farmer has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> that the independence of the created order is questioned, and the tendency is to identify God with the world process. It is but a short step to eliminating the divine aspect of the process and a resulting materialistic view of the world.

Chapter VI: prayer is ethicized. The obvious strength of the position taken by Robinson, Rhymes and van Buren is the insistence that prayer cannot be separated from life as it is lived in responsible union with one's

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<sup>2</sup>The World and God, pp. 172-73.

fellow man. It is not enough to pray for justice; one must work at it! It is not enough to pray for the hungry; they must be fed! Prayer involves one's entire life, as Barth and others have also noted, and one may no longer regard prayer as solely a private conversation between man and his God with no implications for the world about him.

At the same time, the weakness of a humanistic understanding of prayer is that it almost completely removes the communion with God which is at the heart of prayer. This is, of course, more true of Paul van Buren and Douglas Rhymes than John A. T. Robinson. To continue to use the term "prayer" confuses the issue. The men discussed in Chapter VI have clearly given a negative answer to the question which concerns this thesis: Can and does God answer prayer? They would reply that man is the answer to his own best impulses on behalf of others.

PART THREE

A CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT

## CHAPTER VII

### A CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT

It has been said that "an enlightened perception of one's own ignorance is a desirable possession." If this is so, then the study of intercessory prayer has been greatly beneficial for this writer, for there can be no dogmatism in so perplexing and personal a subject. In the end, of course, no one may give a completely rational or satisfying answer to the problem of God's relationship to man and the world in the act of prayer. One may deny that such devotion corresponds to any reality, but then he must reconcile the universal testimony that prayers are answered. One may take a rather naive approach and assume that all prayers are answered if only one has enough "faith" or can get enough people of the right sort (priests, ministers or "saintly" types) to join in the prayer. But honesty compels us to admit that the anguished voice of mankind has cried in vain from the midst of its sorrow and pain. Requests that seem to be in keeping with the nature of God and his purpose for mankind have gone unanswered. And man wonders why God has not halted the brutality, hunger, injustice and death that mocks all that the Christian faith holds dear.

Obviously, for the Christian, the answer lies

somewhere in between these two extremes. The reality of the world will not allow easy answers, but the reality of the Christian experience will not allow one to give up the quest. This concluding chapter will be, therefore, a personal statement of this writer's current understanding--and lack of it--of the meaning of intercessory prayer. It will not be a complete study in itself of every aspect and question relating to intercessory prayer; it will be an attempt to state a positive view of intercessory prayer in light of the major objections that can be brought against it.

## I. THE CHOICES

In Parts One and Two of this thesis the biblical understanding of intercessory prayer and the contemporary Protestant understandings have been isolated. In the former, the validity of such prayer is unquestioned. From Moses to Jesus to Paul there is the unbroken assumption that men ought not only to pray but pray for their fellow men as well; this assumption is grounded upon the personal experience of redemption by the God who is both Creator and Abba, both judgment and mercy, both transcendent and immanent. The growing awareness of the significance of the Incarnation in the early Church meant, among other things, that men could never doubt that God was intimately bound up

with the life of man--though such belief never resulted in an unfounded optimism that God would deliver them out of this world with all its problems.

Protestant thinkers have faced a somewhat different situation in that modern science has seemed to have removed effectively the necessity of postulating a God who can or will answer prayer. In a sense, all of the men considered in Part Two are either reacting against or continuing the emphasis of the Church's capitulation to science in the nineteenth century. Schleiermacher's conclusion that prayer could be little more than vague communion resulting in a pious resignation to the events of this world<sup>1</sup> was a far cry from Jesus' sense of the presence of the living God, and the effects of Schleiermacher's acquiescence to the rigid laws of nature are still felt today.

Four different contemporary approaches to intercessory prayer have been considered. Which of these is the most adequate in dealing with the problem at hand?

From the Christian viewpoint--and this writer must start there--the solution which "ethicizes" prayer is unacceptable. While it rightly emphasizes the social context and personal responsibility involved in intercessory

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<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, II, 668-75; cf. H. R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth, pp. 93-94.

prayer, the elimination of the transcendent dimension fails to do justice either to one's personal experience with God or to the fact of sin.

Another possible answer is that which takes refuge in the sovereignty of God. The transcendent dimension missing in the nineteenth century is reasserted to the detriment of the freedom of man; in prayer man can only identify himself with what God is already doing in the world. This eliminates the reality of man's confrontation with God, the "conflict of will and will," as P. T. Forsyth puts it;<sup>2</sup> it too is unacceptable to the balanced Christian viewpoint.

A valid understanding of intercessory prayer is thus narrowed to a choice between the "subjective" approach favored by Fosdick, Harkness, Burnaby and others, and the "objective" approach of men like Farmer and Buttrick. Each, however, has its weakness. The subjective understanding tends to exclude the possibility of God's working within the order of nature on the grounds that the regularity evidenced therein is an expression of God's already perfect design for this world. There is an element of truth here--one must not too easily dismiss the divine purpose underlying the stability of the universe, but the

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<sup>2</sup>P. T. Forsyth, The Soul of Prayer, p. 92.

incomplete nature of a world in process which has been pointed out by Teilhard de Chardin, William Temple, A. N. Whitehead, Eric Rust and others must also be remembered.

The weakness of the more objective view is that it does not consider the divine purpose in the "laws" of nature; the result is perplexity and disappointment when prayers are not answered.

The solution, it would seem to this writer, must be somewhere between these latter two choices. One must not rule out the possibility of God's directing the ongoing processes of nature in answer to prayer; at the same time one must remember that prayer does not affect what is irrevocable, but cooperates with what is coming to pass. As John Magee has said:

[Prayer] is living at the growing edge of the Universe, those living modal points where the future is coming into existence.<sup>3</sup>

Common sense dictates that prayer cannot help some situations. Man prays for an infected wound, but not an amputated limb; man prays in any situation where the future is still open and flexible, not in those where results are already determined. It is difficult to fix the line between open and closed situations; nevertheless, it is obvious that nature is more flexible at the mental level,

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<sup>3</sup>John Magee, Reality and Prayer, p. 124.

the point where self-direction appears, than at the purely physical or mechanical level. If this is so, it is reasonable to expect the answers to prayer to take place primarily at the mental level. And that is exactly the pattern that is found, for if the objective answer to prayer is often missing, the change in the person who prays sincerely for another is usually dramatic. As George Stewart says in

The Lower Levels of Prayer:

Every earnest act of intercession affects the situation towards which it is directed so vitally as to create a new situation. Through it circumstances are often changed, and even if these are unchanged hearts are changed, and when hearts are changed circumstances are transformed.<sup>4</sup>

It is asserted, then, that intercessory prayer finds its rightful place within the over-all understanding of prayer as a divine-human communion. The nature of man's social relationships is such that inevitably his concerns in this area are brought into the presence of God with the request that the divine wisdom and power be brought to bear on the issue. The prayer is then answered in one of three ways. First, the pray-er is himself enlightened and strengthened and thus becomes God's effective instrument in dealing with the problem. This is the primary way in which prayer is answered. Second, on occasion the

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<sup>4</sup>George S. Stewart, The Lower Levels of Prayer, p. 91. Emphasis mine.

answer to prayer occurs outside of man's activity--but only when such action is consistent with God's purposes for both the created order and man as a responsible creature in that order. Third, when the request is not granted, God grants grace which is sufficient for the weakness.<sup>5</sup> As Harry Emerson Fosdick said: "[God] answers either the petition or the man."<sup>6</sup>

## II. MAJOR OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

Those who question the validity of intercessory prayer typically resort to three basic arguments: (1) A scientific understanding of the structure and regularity of the universe leaves no room for the primitive conceptions of a God who intervenes in a "law-abiding" world in answer to man's desires. (2) To ask God to intervene in the life of another man may on occasion mean that that man's freedom of choice has been overruled, as in the case where prayer is made for another's salvation. Thus, the understanding of man as a free moral agent is at stake in intercessory prayer. (3) God's sovereign knowledge and constant purpose for good makes prayer irrelevant.

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. II Cor. 12:9

<sup>6</sup>Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Meaning of Prayer, p. 124.

These will now be considered, in turn, in order to see if they are indeed valid objections to the understanding of intercessory prayer which has been offered above.

### Providence and Natural Law

In the eighteenth century the astronomer Laplace declared that one could predict accurately the future of every body in the universe if only one knew the exact position and forces upon every particle at one given moment.<sup>7</sup> The results of conceiving the world in such iron-clad mechanistic terms are still with us whenever men eliminate God from the processes of nature in the name of order.<sup>8</sup>

The argument from natural law takes two directions. On the one hand, it is asserted in Deistic fashion that, though God is indeed the source of the physical world and its regularity, he is now bound by it. To this, two answers may be made:

(1) Even if it is true that the world is run by

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<sup>7</sup>Eric C. Rust, Science and Faith: Towards a Theological Understanding of Nature, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup>It was Laplace who, when asked by Napoleon what place God had in his system, allegedly replied that he had found no need for that hypothesis. Rust, Science and Faith, p. 20; John Dillenberger, Protestant Thought and Natural Science, A Historical Interpretation, pp. 185, 214, 217 f., 288.

inexorable law, that does not necessitate a belief in absolute determinism. Man makes use of these "laws" every day in order to accomplish his own purposes; by the selected use and manipulation of the laws of nature, man defies the law of gravity by flying, replaces weeds with vegetables, and snatches health from the jaws of disease and certain death. To suppose that God is powerless where man is powerful defies every instinct for the divine man has ever had.

(2) Even more important than the argument by comparison is the simple fact that modern physics does not support the concept of a rigidly determined universe. Laplace's assertion that the future can be predicted by anyone knowing enough about the laws of nature is something which is unprovable and unacceptable to the "new physics."<sup>9</sup> Rather than viewing nature as a closed system, contemporary physics has to do with a world of indeterminacy and contingency in which "laws" are but statistical probabilities. Even the nonliving substances of the world seem partly self-determining rather than slaves of mechanistic laws to such an extent that A. N. Whitehead calls for a "conception of organism" as the basis of a realistic view

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Sir James Jeans, Physics and Philosophy; Rust, Science and Faith, pp. 32-34.

of nature.<sup>10</sup> While it is true that the Christian must not build his theology in the current models of physical science,<sup>11</sup> there is now no scientific reason for asserting that God's will is determined by absolute laws. The way is open to consider the natural order as responding to the directive impulses of an immanent God. The tendency toward wholeness in the universe, if not mechanical, seems to be the result of a living will which the man of faith calls God.

On the other hand, the argument from natural law may grant the possibility that God is not bound by his own creation, yet insist that the undeniable orderliness of the world is intended by God to provide a stable, dependable setting for man's effort to become a responsible, independent creature. This argument must be taken quite seriously, for it is evident that neither religious devotion nor, to be specific, prayer guarantees that man's needs will be met in the way he desires. The biblical record is realistic at this point;<sup>12</sup> the "peace" which Jesus promised his disciples (John 14:27) was an inner wholeness which sustained them even when life was the cruelest.

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Rust, Science and Faith, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Part One.

What right, then, does man have to ask God to manipulate the regular working of the world structure? As a matter of fact, such answers are rare, but they do occur! When they do occur, they are called "miracles"--not because they violate the laws of nature, but because in the event the providential care of God is glimpsed in a uniquely vivid fashion. Such a "miracle" is the result of prayer because the opening of oneself to God which is at the heart of prayer is a prerequisite to man's discernment of God's participation in the event. One may conceive of things which God wishes to do for his children but cannot until they are receptive.

The Christian, then, affirms the basic goodness and purpose which underlies the regularity of the natural order, but does not thereby eliminate God.

Within the purposes of God predictable order apparently stands high, but we have no reason to think that it stands alone as His one all-determining consideration.<sup>13</sup>

Providence is understood not as supernatural protection from all ill but a trust, derived from an experience with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that the creative power and encompassing goodness of God is present in every

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<sup>13</sup> Harold DeWolf, "The Influence of Prayer on God and Man," Pastoral Psychology, Vol. 4, No. 36 (September, 1953), 23.

situation, "however dark, however evil, however unwilled by Him," to bring his creation to its intended fruition.<sup>14</sup> Providence means that the evil which results in an incomplete and somewhat contingent world does not separate us from the love and communion of God.

Such a view of providence is not arrived at rationally but stems from the specific experience of election which is found in the Judeo-Christian tradition and to a lesser extent, in all religions where, as H. H. Farmer says, God is known as divine succour. Faith that the events of this world may be the result of petition is based upon the prior fact of revelation in which man is "convinced that God is inclined toward him in fatherly love."<sup>15</sup> For the Christian, the belief in divine Providence is ultimately grounded in the Incarnation and in the Church's experience of the Holy Spirit. Here, as Eric Rust points out, the divine "persuasion" which guides the created order towards fulfillment is manifest in a unique way as God is disclosed as accepting the limitations of both physical and personal media.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>George Harkness, The Providence of God, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup>W. Herrmann, "Prayer," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, IX, 156.

<sup>16</sup>This writer is indebted for this insight to the last chapter of Eric C. Rust's manuscript, "Evolutionary Philosophies and Contemporary Theology," to be published

### The Freedom of Man

Another objection to intercessory prayer has been that such prayer unethically violates the freedom of man, that precious heritage which ultimately makes man responsible for his destiny and condition. It is interesting that Origen's third century treatise, "On Prayer," Chapters VI and VII, deals with the question of man's freedom in relation to God's answering of prayer. Origen's solution is that God foreknows from all eternity if, how and under what conditions man will pray and determines his unchangeable will in light of this knowledge. Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether God does in fact answer such intercessory prayers, one may ask whether such action by God would rob man of his freedom of choice? The answer, as Edward Bauman and others have observed,<sup>17</sup> lies in the realization that freedom is not absolute. In reality, freedom is exercised within certain prescribed limits.

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under the same title by The Westminster Press in the Fall of 1968. Rust lends credence to a subjective interpretation of intercessory prayer--one which sees the divine working primarily at the personal rather than the physical level--when he says that the divine disclosure in the Incarnation "draws others into [a] new relationship with God so that, in and through their lives also, there comes a dependent disclosure of God's love" (Ibid., Chapter VIII, Sect. 2; emphasis mine). One should also note Tillich's view that prayer is a personal revelatory event (Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 127).

<sup>17</sup>Edward Bauman, Intercessory Prayer, pp. 38 ff.

Heredity, environmental factors, the actions of the society in which he lives, and the choices which have already been made determine the future choices that are open to any man. Within these conditions man is indeed free to decide.

Could it not be that God's action in response to prayer is to bring certain influences to bear on another, not to force a given decision, but to provide new alternatives at the moment of decision?

Again, the Incarnation is a clue as to how this divine persuasion may woo without overpowering, may win without violating humanity's ultimate right to say "yes" or "no" to the choices that are presented. One would not accuse God of taking unfair advantage of man by presenting his claim in such graphic terms as the life and passion of Jesus of Nazareth. Jerusalem, the city that would not respond to the divine yearning (Matt. 23:37), is a symbol of mankind's freedom to turn its back on its Lord. The divine presence and power were unmistakably there, yet men found it in themselves to turn away from God. In Jesus, as in the world at large, God proves to be a God who hides himself (Isaiah 45:15) as well as reveals himself. His purpose to create independent beings who freely and responsibly turn to their Creator means that God can be trusted not to violate the very thing that makes man's response infinitely worthwhile to him.

The Nature of God

The most serious problem which faces the individual who sincerely grapples with the question of petitionary and intercessory prayer has to do with the nature of God. It is the most serious because it rests upon what seems to be a pious and worthy view of the sovereignty and love of God. In essence, the argument asks why, if God's sovereign knowledge and unmeasurable good will are taken at face value, should one have to pray at all? Can imperfect human knowledge and love presume to inform or persuade the sovereign God?

It is evident that it is intercessory prayer rather than petitionary prayer that poses the problem. Fosdick has demonstrated in a masterful way--to which this writer is much indebted--that petitionary prayer does not necessarily involve altering God's purposes but rather is "giving the wise and good God an opportunity to do what his wisdom and love want done."<sup>18</sup> There are some things God cannot do until a man prays, just as there are some things God cannot (or will not) do unless a man works or thinks.

We have, then, two fundamentally opposed ideas of prayer: one, that by begging we may change the will of God and curry favor . . . ; the other, that prayer is offering God the opportunity to say to us, give to

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Fosdick, Meaning of Prayer, p. 59.

us, and do through us what he wills. Only the second is Christian.<sup>19</sup>

There is so much truth in the above understanding that it would be easy to ignore the harder question--that is, are there occasions when God's actions are specifically determined by the fact that man has made a request? There is nothing inherently more difficult in believing that God may act in the world at large than in believing that God's personal relationship with the individual is changed because prayer has been offered. Harold DeWolf is correct when he says that "prayer implies communication" and communication "implies the exerting of an effect on God"; God's awareness of the one communicating with him is in itself an experience God could not have without man's prayer.<sup>20</sup> To some degree, then, God is affected by our prayers. The prayers of invocation and repentance, for example, imply that God is thereby influenced to come into the presence of the one praying and forgive the sinner. Without faith in the objective efficacy of prayer in changing God's actions and attitudes man could not continue to rely upon the subjective feeling of intimacy and forgiveness which are the result. Harold DeWolf warns those who have merely a psychological

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> DeWolf, op. cit., p. 18.

interest in prayer that the subjective responses which they prize so highly are built upon a faith that God can indeed respond to human prayer.

Prayer produces its own distinctive and generally prized subjective results only when it is believed to be capable of bringing about also objective changes in the attitudes or actions of God.<sup>21</sup>

If, then, one must not discount the objective element in prayer at the level of personal petition, one must also not discount the possibility of an objective element at the level of intercessory prayer. At the same time, the difficulties in believing that God responds to prayer for others must be considered and given due weight. There are several arguments that can be made against the idea of God's being affected by the will of man:

First, it is said that a God who is able but not willing to help unless a third party intercedes is immoral by human standards. This argument would be true if only it were a case of an arbitrary decision to help or not help; if, however, the situation is that mankind's over-all good can be served by refraining from or answering the petition, the argument is no longer valid.

A second argument asks whether an insignificant, unlearned creature like man can be expected to influence

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20.

the sovereign Creator, the ground of the universal being. Aside from the fact that such an attitude would make God immoral--a man does not judge his son's value by his size and knowledge--the belief in the significance of the individual is grounded in the Incarnation and the knowledge that God wills, as Barth insists, that men pray and that their prayers be answered.

Third, the principle of the Incarnation may be taken to mean that man himself must assume responsibility for his own actions. A radical kenotic Christology such as is espoused by Thomas J. J. Altizer<sup>22</sup> would mean that God is no longer "available"; humanity must provide the answer to its own prayers, for the transcendent God is dead! Intercessory prayer would, of course, be meaningless to a man like Altizer. The trouble with such a view is the extremely untenable way in which the transcendence of God is so easily sacrificed to the immanent.<sup>23</sup>

Last, it may be argued that the natural order

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas J. J. Altizer, The Gospel of Christian Atheism.

<sup>23</sup>Critiques of the "death of God" movement may be found in Thomas W. Ogletree, The Death of God Controversy; John Macquarrie, New Directions in Theology Today, Volume III: God and Secularity; Eric C. Rust, "The 'God is Dead' Theology," Review and Expositor, LXIV, No. 3 (Summer, 1967), 271-84; Henlee H. Barnette, The New Theology and Morality.

expresses the explicit purposes of an all-wise and all-knowing God, thus making prayer superfluous. A critique of this argument has already been given. The unfinished, irrational aspect of the universe is sufficient to call such a view into question.

On the other side of the debate, the following may be offered as arguments for God's freedom to respond to man's petitions and, in particular, his intercessions:

First, the argument that God knows and intends the best for all men without prayers seems to assume that God's benevolent will is an absolute, unchangeable factor which exists in a "Platonic" world unmoved by the modulation of human experience. The truth is, however, that a God who wishes the best for his creatures must take into consideration the changing situation, the unpredictable circumstances that are concomitant with human freedom. Prayer as a concrete act within the created order and within the divine-human relationship changes the situation with which God must deal, as Tillich has said.<sup>24</sup>

God must take into account many complex factors, including the need to maintain a stable world order, the need to teach man his dependence upon God and each other,

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<sup>24</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 191.

the need to build a world of free responsible beings, and many other matters.<sup>25</sup> Who is to say that a man's prayer may not be the deciding factor in determining God's action in a given situation? One may conceive, for example, of a situation where the very fact that men are concerned enough to pray for a comrade might create a situation where God's purposes are better served by the invalid's recovery. On the other hand, one must not forget that intercessory prayers are not all that God must consider--thus, as in the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, the best thing that can be done may not be what man desires.

A second argument, closely related to the first, is that men are indissolubly bound up in the social unit of mankind. In a myriad of unseen ways each individual affects society as a whole; the well-being of all depends to some degree on the contribution in labor and thought of the individual. This being so, it is argued, man's responsibility also extends to the level of intercessory prayer. If man fails at this level of responsibility, just as at levels of work and thought, help will not be forthcoming.

Leonard Hodgson, in his Gifford Lectures, has defended God's placing such responsibility on man's shoulders on the grounds that God's waiting on man's prayers is

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<sup>25</sup>DeWolf, op. cit., p. 23.

necessary if men are to mature as fellow workers with the divine in creation and redemption. God's self-limitation, his waiting for man's response, is for no other reason than the fact that "the uncoerced and freely-willed devotion of man to the fulfilment of God's will . . . is the consummation of His work at which the Creator aims."<sup>26</sup>

Belief that God awaits man's asking is not childish, but the consciousness of growing manhood on the part of the creature, the recognition that God has laid on him the responsibility of deciding whether in this detail the divine creative purpose shall go forward or be delayed.<sup>27</sup>

Such an argument is persuasive, but it must be noted the same line of reasoning--that is, God awaits man's prayers to open the possibility of his dealing with some given situation--could also be applied to what has been called the more "subjective" view of intercessory prayer. Prayer is a necessary way of man's cooperating with God in the sense that the well-being of other men depends on the help God channels to them through those who pray.

Whether the argument from man's collective existence is used to support the objective or subjective action of God, the point is still made that God has imposed certain limitations on himself. His purpose to create free,

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<sup>26</sup>Leonard Hodgson, For Faith and Freedom, III, 169.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

responsible human beings is the greater good which dictates that man must be responsible in prayer--even if this should mean that a lesser good does come to pass.

A third argument for the idea that God's sovereign love and knowledge do not preclude his responding to the prayers of men is found in the new understanding of the relation of God and the universe proclaimed by the "process" philosophers and theologians, most of whom are indebted to Alfred North Whitehead.<sup>28</sup> The importance of Whiteheadian process thought to the subject of prayer lies in its understanding of God's openness to the world and the world's openness to the future. While God's "primordial nature" allows God to envision every possible event, he does not actually know what will happen, for the relative independence of the "actual entities" which make up the universe can always assert itself. God in his "consequent nature" responds to the new events which occur in the world; his purpose is then worked out according to the actual state of the world. The future possibilities of the world order are actual possibilities; they are not pre-determined.

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<sup>28</sup>This writer claims no special competence in Whiteheadian philosophy. What follows has been gleaned largely from Richard H. Overman, Evolution and the Christian Doctrine of Creation, pp. 265-93. Cf. also L. Charles Birch, Nature and God.

This interplay between God and other actual entities leaves open the possibility that prayer might be a factor in the concrete situation which affects God who, in turn, affects other entities (men?).<sup>29</sup> If God is enriched or changed by contact with the natural order, it is not unreasonable to believe that this altered nature finds fulfillment or expression in the natural order also.<sup>30</sup> Again one is reminded of Tillich's view that prayer creates a new situation. In an open-ended and incomplete world, we may posit a God-given freedom for man to share in the divine creativity, to shape by deed and prayer the divergent possibilities into the ordered world which the Bible holds out as the telos towards which creation points.

A fourth argument for God's responsiveness to prayer is sufficient for many--that is, the biblical evidence teaches that it is so. In actual fact, this reasoning does

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. Peter Hamilton, The Living God and the Modern World: Christian Theology Based on the Thought of A. N. Whitehead, pp. 174-77, 243-39, and C. J. Curtis, The Task of Philosophical Theology, for treatments of prayer in terms of Whitehead's thought.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Rust, "Evolutionary Philosophies and Contemporary Theology," Chapter VIII, Sect. 2. Rust points out an obvious weakness in process thought--its lack of personal categories. This writer acknowledges that it would be difficult to work out a Christian view of prayer solely in terms of the "organismic" model with which process thought operates, for it would tend to be mechanical and, thus, manipulative.

not solve the problem, for the Bible assumes God's perfect knowledge (Matt. 6:8) and goodness (Matt. 7:11; John 16:26 f.), and could thus lend credence to the idea that prayer involves nothing more than identifying oneself with what God is doing.

A fifth and more persuasive argument is the universality of intercessory prayer and the personal experience of its effectiveness. The argument from the universality of such prayer should not be taken to mean that primitive prayer stands on the same level with mature Christian prayer, nor should it lead to the conclusion that a consensus of opinion about the validity of prayer proves men to be universally given to gross credulity. Rather it means that all men are, in varying degrees, dimly aware of the presence of a Will other than their own, a Will which is perceived to be responsive to their needs.<sup>31</sup>

The argument from experience asserts that in the crucible of life is proved a reality about God and his relationship to men that cannot quite be captured by the unaided mind. Just as the will of God is known by the doing of that will (John 7:17), so the reality of intercessory

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<sup>31</sup>Cf. A. W. Robinson, "Prayer, in Relation to the Idea of Law," Essays on Some Theological Questions of the Day by Members of the University of Cambridge, H. B. Swete, editor, p. 306.

prayer is known only in those moments when one is driven to his knees to grapple with God, his only source of help. Harry Emerson Fosdick writes of a nervous breakdown which struck him during his first year at Union Seminary.

In that experience . . . , I learned to pray, not because I had adequately argued out prayer's rationality, but because I desperately needed help from a Power greater than my own. I learned that God, much more than a theological proposition, is an immediately available Resource; that . . . around our spirits is a spiritual Presence in living communion with whom we can find sustaining strength.<sup>32</sup>

The fact of experience is, then, the most compelling of the arguments for the freedom of God to respond to intercessory prayer. Examples could be multiplied many times of the occasions when men have been convinced that their intercessions were answered or that they themselves were the recipients of a special grace because someone else prayed for them. Such conviction is not "proof," however; indeed none of the above arguments "prove" anything in the logical or empirical sense. The most that can be asserted is that they silence the dogmatic claims that God cannot be affected by man's prayers. Once this is done, the way is open for a fresh evaluation of the evidence that God and man can indeed meet in the most personal of relationships-- a relationship in which each affects the other.

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<sup>32</sup>Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Living of These Days: An Autobiography, p. 75.

## III. TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER

It would be presumptuous to attempt to elaborate a detailed theology of intercessory prayer; that would be a thesis in itself. It is obvious that such a study, if done adequately, would involve every major doctrine traditionally accepted as part of the formulation of the Christian faith. There are some doctrines, however, that are absolutely essential in a thorough examination of the Christian understanding of intercessory prayer.

The Doctrine of God

No understanding of intercessory prayer is possible without an adequate understanding of the age-old problem of the immanence and transcendence of God--without the former, intercession is pointless; without the latter, intercession is impossible. The meaning of the Incarnation and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit are also important. The Incarnation is the measure of God's love and involvement in the material order; it is the visible sign of God's redemptive ministry in which man is asked to join. The understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer is a possible clue as to the meaning of God's immanence which does not destroy his transcendence.<sup>33</sup> Of

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<sup>33</sup>Cf. A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, "Immanence and Transcendence," The Spirit, B. H. Streeter, editor, pp. 1-22.

utmost importance here is the recovery of the biblical understanding of God as Abba as it was revealed by Jesus and experienced in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

### The Doctrine of Man

Intercessory prayer cannot be understood apart from a clear understanding of man, both man in his grandeur and man in all of his misery and weakness. A theological understanding of man, the free and responsive creature, as the goal of creation is important in relation to both the one praying and the object of prayer; how the fact of prayer correlates with this purpose needs to be treated carefully, as Leonard Hodgson has done in For Faith and Freedom. What is the exact nature of man's corporate solidarity? The dispute over the relation of mental telepathy to intercessory prayer depends on the answer given to the above question.<sup>34</sup>

### The Doctrine of Creation

The questions of providence and the meaning of

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<sup>34</sup>Nels F. S. Ferre, A Theology for Christian Prayer, pp. 57-61, builds his understanding of intercessory prayer on a type of telepathy which he calls "interconnected spiritual reality." He says that "spirit with spirit can meet in creative openness and mutual helpfulness when both are enfolded in the great, eternal Spirit from whom they come, in whom they live, and to whom they go" (Ibid., p. 60). This sort of interpretation bears further study.

natural law have already been treated; the difficulties they raise are obvious. In addition, the recurring question of "miracle" should also receive some attention inasmuch as the answers to intercessory prayer are usually classed as miraculous.

### The Doctrine of the Church

Prayer takes place within the context of the believing community. It is necessary, then, to recognize what role the community (the Church) can and does play in both the answering of prayer and the clarifying of the objectives of prayer.<sup>35</sup>

### The Doctrine of Redemption

If, as the Church has always taught, man has a responsible role to play in the redemption of the world and the reconciliation of man and God, what part does prayer play in such a task? The extremes of (1) monastic retreat from the world and (2) humanistic involvement in the world at the expense of a transcendent dimension must be avoided. Intercessory prayer must be related not only to man as the instrument of God's redeeming activity but also to the sovereignty of a God who is not limited by

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<sup>35</sup>Douglas Rhymes, Prayer in the Secular City, is helpful at this point.

his own creation in achieving his purposes both for man and the world.

#### IV. CONCLUDING STATEMENT

In the preceding study this writer has attempted to arrive at some significant conclusions about the nature and validity of intercessory prayer. These conclusions may now be stated in the form of a major conclusion and a minor, more tentative, conclusion. The major conclusion is that there is no valid reason for denying the fact that God can and does respond to prayers of petition and intercession. Such belief is consistent with the Christian understanding of God and man and with the scientific understanding of the universe. It is grounded in man's experience with the electing love of the personal Will which is the ground of all being.

The minor conclusion is somewhat less dogmatic, but nevertheless important. It appears that the way in which God answers intercessory prayer is primarily in relation to the person praying. Intercessory prayer, then, allows man the freedom to participate in God's redemptive action not only at the level of desire (prayer) but at the level of action. This does not mean that what have been termed "objective" answers to prayer are completely denied. This possibility must always remain open--there is too much

evidence to deny it--even though it has more inherent problems than the subjective view.

Finally, this writer would like to add his testimony to those who say that the mysterious seas of prayer which connect man and God cannot be crossed by simply pondering navigational charts which show that it can be done. Ultimately each man must himself launch into the uncertain waters if he is to reach the other side. But the charts must not be discounted! It is hoped that this thesis may have shown that there is ample reason for believing that the practice of intercessory prayer is based on an abiding reality. There is a gracious, loving, creative Father into whose wise care may be entrusted man's deepest hopes and desires for himself, his fellow man, and his world.

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THE THEOLOGY OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER: WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO CONTEMPORARY PROTESTANT THEOLOGY

Thomas Furman Hewitt, Th.D.,  
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1968

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Few affirmations of the Christian faith generate as many questions and doubts as the belief in the efficacy of petitionary and intercessory prayer. Does God respond to men's prayers? If so, how? The primary purpose of this study is to examine the various ways of understanding intercessory prayer--that is, petition which involves a third party--found in the writings of twentieth century Protestant theologians. An evaluation of both the strengths and weaknesses of each of the four views represented and the biblical presuppositions about prayer leads to a statement of the author's own interpretation of intercessory prayer.

Part One of the study is composed of two chapters dealing, in brief compass, with the presuppositions of intercessory prayer in the Old and New Testaments. These basic assumptions are: the electing love of God, the sovereign control of God over the material order, the personal nature of God--especially the thought of God as Abba, and the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer. The gradual

shift away from a materialistic, manipulative view of intercession is carefully noted.

Part Two is a study of the four major ways in which the relationship of prayer, God and the world order are interpreted by twentieth century Protestant writers. The representatives of the first view, that prayer actually affects God's actions, are H. H. Farmer and George Buttrick. The second approach is that intercessory prayer consists in aligning the one praying with the will of God; the spokesmen for this view are John R. Rice, the Fundamentalist editor, and Karl Barth. A third possible interpretation is that prayer is effective primarily in and through the one praying; the natural order is viewed as virtually closed to divine guidance. Here the representatives are Georgia Harkness, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and John Burnaby. The last possible understanding of intercession is one which ethicizes prayer into concrete action on behalf of one's fellow man and tends to omit any transcendent dimension. At this extreme are found John A. T. Robinson, Douglas Rhymes and Paul van Buren.

A critique of the above four views in the light of Christian revelation and the present level of scientific knowledge leads to the conclusion that the first and third interpretations have fewer problems than the others. Part Three, then, defends the thesis that there is no justification for dismissing the possibility that God can and does

respond to man's prayers. The objections against which this affirmation is made have to do with the problems of natural law, the doctrine of the wisdom and goodness of God, and the freedom of man.

A secondary conclusion of this study is that the primary mode of God's response to intercessory prayer is at the personal level, that is, through the one who intercedes. It is acknowledged that in the final analysis, the efficacy of intercessory prayer cannot be proved but is an intuitive judgment of faith.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Name: Thomas Furman Hewitt

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Education:

Public schools, Columbia, S. C. (1944-1956)  
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Church-related experience--

Associate pastor, Lake City Baptist Church,  
Lake City, S. C. (1960)  
Associate pastor, Earlewood Baptist Church,  
Columbia, S. C. (1962)  
Associate pastor, Clifton Forge Baptist Church,  
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Pastor, Friendship Baptist Church, Sinai, Ky.  
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Academic experience--

Professor's assistant in Old Testament and  
Archaeology (1962-1964), and Historical  
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Graduate Fellow in Old Testament and Archaeology  
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