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The Psychology of Prayer

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PRAYER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Christianity in essence is the reconciliation of man to God accomplished by the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and the new life in union with Christ that has its origin and motivation in the Atonement. This new life in union with Christ finds one of its fullest expressions in that communication with God which Christians call prayer.

To maintain its position as the key-city, the very heart of true religion, prayer must needs be intelligently grounded, alive, and God-centered.[1]

Prayer must not be out of focus with one's other convictions. It must conform perfectly with the Christian conception of God and Christ. It must have a solid theological foundation. It must be <u>intelligently grounded</u>.

Prayer must not be what Karl Marx called religion--the opiate of the people, a comfortable insulation from the demands of radical action. It must not be a mere appendage to one's religion, nor a mere religious appendage to one's life. It is in truth "the Christian's vital breath." It must be <u>alive</u>.

Prayer must not center in a morbid observation of one's inner states. It must not be merely a matter of psychological analysis, nor a strong autosuggestion that produces an ecstatic trance. It must be

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[1] <u>Cf</u>. Georgia Harkness, <u>Prayer and the Common Life</u> (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1948), p. 18.

God-centered.

Dr. Buttrick believes that true religion stands or falls with prayer. He ventures this opinion: "Perhaps our scientific dogmatism knows, though dimly, that if prayer can be riddled by argument or captured by scoffing the whole realm of religion will fall. Perhaps the badly shaken forces of religion also know, though dimly, that if prayer is renewed the prevalent skepticism must bow."[2] Be that as it may, it is certain that if Christian people return to a virile New Testament prayer-life that is intelligently grounded, alive, and God-centered, there is little danger that the specious argumentation of scientific agnosticism will cause the realm of religion to fall.

This thesis proposes to present a brief description of the kind of prayer that possesses the three characteristics named above. The discussion is arranged according to the following outline: prayer according to the New Testament, prayer and religious experience, and God as the impulse for prayer.

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[2]George A. Buttrick, Prayer (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1942), p. 15.

CHAPTER II

PRAYER ACCORDING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief and more or less systematic treatment of prayer according to the New Testament; this is to serve as a theological basis for the psychological remarks which follow in subsequent chapters.

The student who proposes to undertake a systematic investigation of some "point of Christian doctrine" will experience nothing but frustration if he thinks to carry out such a systematic presentation with complete consistency. For while it is mathematically true that the whole is equal to the sum of its parts, the analogy does not strictly apply to theology. The body of Christian doctrine can hardly be conceived of as the arithmetical sum of the several points of doctrine, because it is an organic whole to which all atomic and mechanical divisions are somehow foreign. We can not speak of any particular aspect of New Testament teaching without reference to the whole, at least by implication. Therefore we find ourselves in the peculiar position of having to say two or more things at once. Such a task is obviously impossible, since human reason is obliged to consider issues in logical or chronological sequences.

The dilemma will perhaps become more evident as we attempt to discuss prayer. According to the New Testament, it can be said that prayer is communion with God; that prayer is speech uttered to God in the name of Jesus Christ; that prayer must be spoken in the spirit of Christ,

that is, with the proper motives of love and obedience to God; that prayer is always a confession of sin; that the prayer of prayers is, "Thy will be done."

Actually, to say all these things is to say the same basic thing; and yet it is important to say them all. And in saying them, it is necessary to keep in mind that the focal point, the center to which each statement must be oriented, is the redemptive act of Christ as symbolized in the Cross. It must be understood at the outset, then, that it is the Cross which gives meaning and significance to everything that the New Testament says about prayer. It is the Cross which stands behind that specific but comprehensive principle, that every prayer must be offered in Christ's name.[1]

To say that prayer must be offered in Christ's name is to say that prayer is the speech of a faith that has Jesus Christ and His Atonement as its object. "In every case," writes Aulen, "Christian prayer is uttered with Christ in mind."[2] And Buttrick believes that "prayer itself is the central act of faith. . . . prayer, being its own venture of faith, is itself faith in exercise."[3] This is evident in Jesus' description of Himself as the true vine, of which His followers are the branches. In that connection He says: "If you abide in me, and my

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[1]John 14:13.14; 16:23.24.

[2]Gustaf Aulen, The Faith of the Christian Church, translated from the fourth Swedish edition by Eric H. Wahlstrom and G. Everett Arden (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1948), p. 405.

[3]George A. Buttrick, Prayer (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1942), p. 154 f.

words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you."[4] Jesus seems to be explaining just what it means to pray in His name--the pray-er must abide in Him, and His words must abide in the pray-er. John illustrates the point pertinently in his first epistle: "We receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."[5]

To say that prayer must be offered in Christ's name is to say that because of Christ and His Atonement we <u>can</u> come to God in prayer. This recalls the New Testament picture of Christ as our interceding High Priest, a figure that is especially prominent in Hebrews, where we read that Christ "is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."[6] Paul refers to Christ as our Intercessor, too, when he says that it is "Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us."[7] This is not to say, however, that Christ acts as a messenger boy who communicates our prayers to God. But it does mean this: Christ wants us to know that God loves us as a Father and will certainly receive our prayers; not because we are so worthy and lovable in ourselves, but because we are

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[4]John 15:7. New Testament quotations are from the Revised Standard Version in every case, unless otherwise indicated.

[5]1 John 3:22.23.

[6]Heb. 7:25.

[7]Rom. 8:34.

attached to His Son in bonds of love and faith, bonds that embrace Him with the full realization that He is in person and in work the very revelation of God's will toward us.[8]

To pray in Christ's name is to acknowledge our utter dependence upon God. The life of faith, from which prayer is certainly inseparable, originates and unfolds through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God (or Spirit of Christ).[9] Once again, the beautiful picture of Christ as the vine and His disciples as the branches illustrates this idea of the believer's utter dependence upon God.[10] As branches we depend entirely on the vine for life; and only by virtue of that organic connection to Christ can we bear fruit--fruit in the form of prayer and work. "For apart from me you can do nothing."[11] Paul summarizes the point when he writes to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."[12]

To pray in Christ's name is to admit, in fact, that prayer is actually God's own act. Aulen feels that "the most profound interpretation conceives of prayer as God's own act,"[13] since prayer is the

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[8]John 16:25-8.

[9]Rom. 8:9-17.

[10]John 15:1-11.

[11]John 15:5.

[12]Gal. 2:20.

[13]Aulen, op. cit., p. 401.

means by which God who answers prayer realizes His loving will. Paul states that when we cry, "Abba, Father!" it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. We do not even know how to pray as we ought, says Paul, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs and groans that are too deep for words. That same Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.[14]

To pray in Christ's name is to imply in every prayer a confession of sins. This is evident from the fact (cf. above) that Christ is our Advocate with the Father, our Intercessor, our Great High Priest--the Way, the Truth, and the Life, through whom we come to the Father. In acknowledging that Christ is our only means of approach to the Father, we acknowledge simultaneously our own unworthy, sinful condition. This is undoubtedly the significance of the inclusion of the fifth petition in the Lord's Prayer: In teaching His disciples how to pray, Jesus wanted them to understand that an attitude of confession must be present in every prayer, implicitly if not explicitly.[15]

To pray in Christ's name is to pray in Christ's spirit. Miss Harkness enlarges on this point as follows:

> This means to pray in Christ's spirit of trust in God, love for God, willing obedience to his call. It is to pray in his spirit of love for all men as sons of God, each of supreme worth in God's sight. It is to pray with his sympathetic eagerness to heal, lift, and minister to all. It is to pray in his spirit of sincerity, humility, compassion. . . . It is to pray with his

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[14]Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15.16.26.27. Cf. also Ps. 139; and Ps. 51:15, "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise."

[15]Cf. the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, Luke 18:9-14.

concern for the inner motive out of which all right acting proceeds.[16]

To pray in Christ's spirit, then, is to pray in a spirit of humility; for the purpose of prayer is to communicate with God and not to demonstrate piety and flowery phrases to men. We refer again for illustration to the parable of the Pharisee and the publican in the temple (note 15). Jesus speaks to this point also in the Sermon on the Mount: "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. . . . And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words."[17]

Those last-quoted words of Jesus indicate also that sincerity is of the essence for prayer offered in Christ's spirit. Jesus tells the woman of Samaria that those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth.[18] Grensted would go so far as to say: "The test whether of worship or of prayer is sincerity, and the test of sincerity is that the worshipper should forget all else save that he is speaking with his God."[19]

To pray in Christ's spirit involves understanding, complete con-

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[16]Georgia Harkness, Prayer and the Common Life (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1948), p. 93.

[17]Matt. 6:5.7.

[18]John 4:21-24.

[19]L. W. Grensted, Psychology and God: A Study of the Implications of Recent Psychology for Religious Belief and Practice (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), p. 84.

centration, and strict focus of attention. Apparently Paul had such an idea in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians: "I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also."[20] One of the tried and tested devices for focusing attention in prayer is the habit of going off to a private spot that is free from the disturbances of the madding crowd. This was the Lord's custom; numerous references in the Gospel accounts tell of Him withdrawing alone into a mountain to pray.

It is self-evident that prayer in Christ's spirit must again and again take the form of thanksgiving and praise. Paul exhorts the Ephesians to "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father."[21] In the same letter he makes his own exemplary little prayer of praise: "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."[22]

To pray in Christ's name is to bow in humble submission to the will of God. Buttrick calls such consecration to God's will "the mood of prayer into which all other moods resolve."[23] The faithful Christian

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[20] 1 Cor. 14:15.

[21] Eph. 5:18-20.

[22] Eph. 3:20.21.

[23] Buttrick, op. cit., p. 224.

who prays in Christ's name also prays as Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."[24] Like Mary, he says: "Let it be to me according to your word."[25] Like John the Baptist, he says: "He must increase, but I must decrease."[26] Like the converted Saul, he says: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"[27] On the basis of these New Testament thoughts and others, Aulen points out that the ultimate purpose of the prayer of faith is the realization of God's loving will. He continues:

> This is the constitutive element in all militant prayer. Whatever the prayer of Christian faith asks for, its ultimate goal points in this direction. Faith cannot and does not desire anything else than the realization of God's loving will. Therefore the prayer of all prayers is always "Thy will be done."[28]

This "prayer of all prayers" is meant to preclude any childish and selfish approach to God. It would perhaps be well for many an adult to remember that prayer does not tell God anything which He does not know, nor does it persuade Him to come to the rescue, nor does it plead with Him to change His mind; for the man in Christ "does not look to the Infinite to help him in his finite interests but, rather, seeks to surrender his finite interests to the Infinite."[29] "Thy will be done" expresses the

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[24]Luke 22:42. Cf. also Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36.

[25]Luke 1:38.

[26]John 3:30.

[27]Acts 9:6 (A. V.).

[28]Aulen, op. cit., p. 403.

[29]Fulton J. Sheen, Peace of Soul (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., c.1949), p. 60.

central significance of prayer: It is never a mere device for invoking the magical power of God to solve an individual's selfish problem. But it is the Christian's alert consciousness to the demands of God's will; it is the opening of the soul to Him so that He can speak to the pray-er; it is a humble request that God would stand by with the resources for faith and love that can overcome the stumbling-blocks of worldliness and selfishness. The sensitivity to God's will that such prayer suggests turns the praying one to the supply of the grace of God in Christ.[30]

Considered from the viewpoint of God's gracious will, prayer can never mean only a vague interest in goodness; but it must mean the desire that God's goodness may become active in the individual's life. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ," is Paul's admonition.[31] And what is that "law of Christ"? According to John, it is "that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."[32] Thus prayer inevitably becomes intercession,

> . . . simply because prayer is primarily concerned with the realization of the divine and loving will. When Christian faith is isolated, it withers. When prayer dwells in the presence of divine love, it cannot be concerned simply with me and mine; it becomes necessarily also a bearing of the burdens of others. Thus prayer expands into intercession.[33]

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[30] Cf. Richard R. Caemmerer, The Church in the World (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1949), p. 71. Buttrick's comment on the subject: "To pray is to expose oneself to the promptings of God; and, by the same token, to become less suggestible to the low persuasions of the world." Op. cit., p. 150.

[31] Gal. 6:2.

[32] 1 John 3:23.

[33] Aulen, op. cit., p. 406.

In conclusion, it should be stated that the petition, "Thy will be done," does not signify blind and fatalistic resignation. In an excellent discussion of this matter, Aulen points out that if this were the case, it would be the submissive resignation of one who prays to surrounding circumstances, as if these circumstances were in themselves a direct expression of the divine will. Such a misinterpretation occurs because of the tendency to accept everything that happens without question as a direct expression of the divine will. But such an enervating acceptance ignores the fact that there is much in existence which is not expressive of God's will, but rather in actual open conflict with it.[34] Thus a correct interpretation imparts a trumpet sound to the words, "Thy will be done"--instead of a weak sigh of resignation, they become a crusade. That was Paul's experience; although he besought the Lord three times, his thorn in the flesh remained to plague him. But he boasted the more gladly of his weaknesses, that the power of Christ might rest upon him; for when he was weak, then he was strong.[35]

The Westminster Shorter Catechism summarizes the foregoing New Testament principles about as well as any brief statement could be expected to do: "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies."[36]

This preliminary discussion of prayer according to the New Testament

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[34] Ibid., p. 403 f.

[35] 2 Cor. 12:7-10.

[36] Question 98, as quoted by Harkness, op. cit., p. 26, n. 1.

makes no claim whatever to completeness. Its purpose, as stated above, is simply to lay a proper Christian foundation for all the material which follows. Many of the points referred to in this chapter will be discussed at greater length in the following chapters; the writer feels, however, that any remarks on prayer from a psychological angle must be judged for correctness and relevance from New Testament principles rather than from a strict scientific psychology.

CHAPTER III

PRAYER AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The difficulties in trying to give a systematic description of prayer from the New Testament have already been indicated. Such difficulties present themselves also in attempts to describe prayer empirically.

Some writers on the subject feel that they have already attained and are already perfect in their definition. The Wiemans, who purport to give a normative psychology of religion, seem to approach the whole matter in a typical anthropocentric manner that is at once vague, sterile, and cold:

> . . . prayer is an attempt to adjust the personality in such a way as to attain community of interest and creative interaction. . . . The efficacy of prayer depends on the adjustment of the personality to some reality in such a way as to attain desired ends. . . . Since prayer is an adjustment of the total personality seeking community of interest and creative interaction, it is a moral and religious undertaking.[1]

And again:

> Prayer is adjusting the personality to God in such a way that God can work more potently for good than he otherwise could, as the outstretched wings of a bird enable the rising currents to carry it to higher levels.[2]

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[1]Henry Nelson Wieman and Regina Westcott-Wieman, Normative Psychology of Religion (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, c.1935), p. 130.

[2]Ibid., p. 137.

Communion with God

To speak of prayer as the adjustment of the personality to some reality is to utterly ignore the vital nature of prayer as the communion of a man with his God. Jesus was always conscious of this intimate, personal quality of prayer--this is plainly evident from any of the Gospel accounts, and needs no specific documentation.

His prayers were offered in the various forms of petition, intercession, thanksgiving, worship, and adoration. And yet to name all these forms, while it reveals the richness of His personal experience and intercourse with His Father, does not nearly exhaust the meaning of prayer. Relton comments pertinently that we must ever bear in mind that prayer in itself "transcends all its forms and overflows them. To describe it adequately would be to describe in all their infinite variety the relations of the human soul with God."[3] Thus Heiler is certainly more profound than Wieman when he defines prayer as "ein lebendiger Verkehr des Frommen mit dem persönlich gedachten und als gegenwärtig erlebten Gott, ein Verkehr, der die Formen der menschlichen Gesellschaftsbeziehungen widerspiegelt."[4] It is this living intercourse or communion with a personal and immanent God which we take to be the very essence of the religious experience of prayer.

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[3]H. M. Relton, "The Psychology of Prayer and Religious Experience," Psychology and the Church, edited by O. Hardman (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), p. 79.

[4]Friedrich Heiler, Das Gebet: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche und Religionspsychologische Untersuchung (4te Auflage; Muenchen: Verlag von Ernst Reinhardt, 1921), p. 491.

Ineffability

To designate prayer as communion with God and to describe the implications of that designation are two entirely different matters. This difficulty of putting into words an experience which involves the will, intellect, and fellings must be conceded by psychologists and theologians alike who are worthy of the name. The psychologist, for instance, must first define mind and experience in general before he can pass on to religious experience.

Matthews recognizes the limitations of the psychological standpoint in its attempts to give complete descriptions of these processes. He points out that knowledge involves the relation of a subject and an object--the knower and the thing known. Thus, if the knowledge in question is knowledge of self or of the self's experience, there would seem to be two selves in the transaction, the self that knows and the self that is known; these two "selves" might be referred to as the "transcendental" and the "empirical" ego. It is obvious, too, that psychology can deal only with the "empirical" ego, or the self that is known. It seems almost inevitable to conclude that there must always be an element in the self which cannot be scientifically known, and a very essential and basic element at that. Matthews concludes his point: "There is no means of estimating the degree of ignorance and imperfection which this limitation involves; we can only recognise that a complete description of mind is necessarily beyond the power of scientific

investigation."[5]

As to the difficulty of describing experience in general, the following illustration may clarify the matter: Life may be compared to a patch of light on the current of a river, an area of clear definition which shades off gradually into the darkness. This patch of light is seen as one unit which can be analyzed and described in detail. But actually the whole process of analysis is unnatural and secondary; it is a post-mortem examination, because all the while the stream flows on and passes away. That which is being explained in the present tense is already past before the words of explanation have been uttered. And thus a description of experience is that work of the understanding which follows the living moment.[6] It would seem obvious, then, if the illustration has any validity, that one can know what he experiences only after the experience is gone; what he knows, therefore, is the memory of the experience, and not the experience itself. Furthermore, the memory itself must enter into the complex mental state of introspection in order to be analyzed, and thereby a transformation is once again affected.[7]

This state of introspection is subject to yet another disability, as Matthews points out. He believes that experience is almost certainly

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[5]W. R. Matthews, "The Psychological Standpoint and its Limitations," Psychology and the Church, op. cit., p. 17.

[6]This illustration is used by Bradley, Principles of Logic, p. 54, and is adapted here from L. W. Grensted, Psychology and God: A Study of the Implications of Recent Psychology for Religious Belief and Practice (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), p. 15.

[7]Matthews, op. cit., p. 16.

a continuous process, that is, the events in our mental life are not a succession of sharply defined experiences, but they are one unbroken experience in which elements blend and fade indiscernibly into one another. When we engage in introspection, however, we artificially mutilate this living, moving process. We say to the vital moment, "Stand still, so that I can look at you," and thus we begin with a necessary and unavoidable falsification.[8]

Therefore it would seem almost a psychological truism to say that all immediate experience is ineffable. No definition can impart the quality of a certain color or the odor of a certain flower; and anyone who tries to tell of such matters can only hope that his auditor has had a similar experience, else the words will be meaningless.

This is no less true of religious experience, and in particular of the experience of communion with God in prayer. Brightman maintains that if one has experienced the presence of God and that relation to Him called the mystical union, one can not describe this mystical moment intelligibly to a person who has never felt the divine presence; the whole concept will be a foreign one.[9] Most of the Christian mystics agree in declaring that their experience lies beyond all description; and though they then proceed to describe it with singular fluency, they finally conclude that words fail them. James refers to the sudden conversion experience of M. Alphonse Ratisbonne, a French Jew, to Protestantism, and quotes from a personal letter of the latter as follows:

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[8]Ibid.

[9]Edgar Sheffield Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1945), p. 168.

> "Heavens, how can I speak of it? Oh no! human words can not attain to expressing the inexpressible. Any description, however sublime it might be, could be but a profanation of the unspeakable truth. . . . I express myself badly. But do you wish, Lord, that I should inclose in poor and barren words sentiments which the heart alone can understand?"[10]

The ineffability of religious experience is a strong point against those psychologists who have attempted to undermine the evidential worth of such experience from an empirical analysis of the data and an alleged description of their processes. When states of feeling and mental activities are thus artificially analyzed and dissected, the remains are simply the bare bones and inanimate tissues of an experience which eludes the psychologist's grasp, even as the life-principle eludes the grasp of the physiologist. As mentioned above, the analysis follows the experience which is being analyzed; the two are not contemporaneous. Because of this time-interval between experience felt and experience analyzed, it seems inevitable that the very element which constitutes the fullest reality of the experience--perhaps it might be called the transcendental element--escapes the psychological observer. And this is especially true of the religious experience, because that experience stirs a man to the depths of his being so that subsequent descriptive analysis finds it virtually impossible to communicate to others the essence of the experience. Thus also any empirical description of prayer, however exhaustive, can not fully cover its content.[11]

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[10]William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: The Modern Library, c.1902), p. 221 f. Cf. 2 Cor. 12:1-7, where Paul combines conviction and reserve in an account of his own Christian experiences.

[11]This argumentation is ably presented by Relton, op. cit., p. 81 f.

This is not to discredit the contribution of psychology to the study of religious experience. But it does indicate that the significance of religion (i.e. the Christian religion) in life is not revealed wholly by its observable extent. In part, at least, its significance is found in its subjective intensity. The "feltness" of a sensation can not be reproduced in a psychological analysis--nor can an objective description of religion do full justice to the actual experience. And since it is impossible for the experient to present to those who have not felt it the deep conviction of the worth and reality of his experience, it is the task of psychology to mark its outward effects without overlooking the individual and his experience.[12] However, psychology need not think that it has exhausted the matter merely because it has not overlooked the individual and his experience. For if prayer has any meaning, the mind is not alone: as stated earlier in this chapter, we take it to be in communion with God. Therefore we agree with Buttrick when he says: "To treat the mind as an entity may yield knowledge not otherwise gained, but the knowledge will not be proportioned or final knowledge."[13]

Pragmatism

Some psychologists maintain that the worth and validity of any experience, including religious experience, must be judged on the basis

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[12] Ibid., p. 84. Relton acknowledges his indebtedness to the thesis of Dr. Waterhouse on The Philosophy of Religious Experience.

[13] George A. Buttrick, Prayer (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1942), p. 130.

of empirical data which indicate beneficial results, rather than on the basis of the origin of the experience. William James may be regarded as the original exponent of this pragmatic psychology. He builds much of his theory on the philosophical system of pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce, whose thesis he summarizes in this manner:

> Thought in movement has for its only conceivable motive the attainment of belief, or thought at rest. Only when our thought about a subject has found its rest in belief can our action on the subject firmly and safely begin. Beliefs, in short, are rules for action; and the whole function of thinking is but one step in the production of active habits. If there were any part of a thought that made no difference in the thought's practical consequences, then that part would be no proper element of the thought's significance.[14]

James deplores the fact that the origin of a truth has so often been a favorite test of its validity, whether it be origin in papal authority, origin in supernatural revelation, origin in direct possession by a higher spirit, or origin in automatic utterance generally. On the contrary, James feels that it is the work that is done that is important--by their fruits ye shall know them, and not by their roots, because the roots are inaccessible. For James, the last resort of certitude is the common assent of mankind, or of those among mankind who are competent by instruction and training.[15] He quotes with approval from Jonathan Edwards' Treatise on Religious Affections: "In forming a judgment of ourselves now, we should certainly adopt that evidence which our supreme

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[14]James, op. cit., p. 435, as adapted from Charles Sanders Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," Popular Science Monthly, XII (January, 1878), 286.

[15]Ibid., p. 20 f. The purpose of James' argument on behalf of pragmatic criteria is to counter the assumption that pathological origin of religious experience discredits the experience. Space does not permit a discussion of that particular subject in this place.

Judge will chiefly make use of when we come to stand before him at the last day." And again: "The degree in which our experience is productive of practice shows the degree in which our experience is spiritual and divine."[16] He agrees whole-heartedly with Professor Coe, who writes that "the ultimate test of religious values is nothing psychological, nothing definable in terms of how it happens, but something ethical, definable only in terms of what is attained."[17]

In criticism of James' refusal to accept the origin of religious experience as a valid criterion of its worth, it must be said that he is guilty of the same type of dogmatism of which he accuses the "authoritarian religionists." He accuses them of setting up an arbitrary authority (papal, supernatural revelation, or otherwise) to vindicate the validity of their beliefs. And yet he himself sets up such an arbitrary authority---the common assent of mankind, or those who are competent by instruction and training, or the judgment of William James himself! For who, after all, is to judge whether the fruits are good, or the results beneficial? Who is to judge whether something ethical has been attained? Indeed, who is to choose the competent judges, and who is to decide the nature and extent of their instruction and training? It seems that we must return to the origin of the experience in the final analysis, after all.

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[16] Ibid., p. 21. Whether Edwards would agree with James and his pragmatic criteria for judging Christian experience is highly problematical. It seems quite likely that James is here making an application of Edwards' words that will serve his own purpose.

[17] George A. Coe, The Spiritual Life (New York: 1900), as quoted ibid., p. 236.

In the second place, to make an exclusive application of the pragmatic criteria of empirical data to the religious experience of prayer is once again to ignore utterly the vital nature of prayer as the communion of a man with his God. The origin of the prayer experience is in God, specifically, in the God-man relationship established through the Atonement of Christ. That origin, that relationship of God to man, is of supreme significance, for it alone can bear fruit that is pleasing to God, and it alone can supply the standard for judging the worth of that fruit.[18]

Theological Dogmatism[19]

Generally speaking, the attempts of theological dogmatism to describe the prayer experience of communion with God have been no more successful than the attempts of descriptive and pragmatic psychology. The theological dogmatist is usually constrained to begin with a battery of philosophical proofs for the existence of God, following the rationalistic footsteps of Aristotle, the scholastic theologians, and the seventeenth-century Protestant dogmaticians. According to James, that vast literature of proofs for the existence of God, which a century ago seemed so convincing, today does little more than gather dust in libraries.[20] Perhaps those proofs are trotted out often enough to

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[18]For an effective critique of James that is thoroughly Christian, cf. Sv. Norborg, Varieties of Christian Experience (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, c.1937), passim.

[19]This term is used advisedly. The writer feels that there is a vast difference between theological dogmatism and legitimate dogmatic theology.

[20]James, op. cit., p. 73.

rearrange the dust that has deservedly settled on them; but for all the assurance they can give to Christian faith, they would do better to remain in some remote library stack.

Next the theological dogmatist explodes an overwhelming barrage of proof and description of the metaphysical attributes of God, couched in pedantic dictionary-adjectives and sonorous abstractions, "aloof," as James puts it, "from morals, aloof from human needs, something that might be worked out from the mere word 'God' by one of those logical machines of wood and brass which recent ingenuity has contrived." He concludes: "So much for the metaphysical attributes of God! From the point of view of practical religion, the metaphysical monster which they offer to our worship is an absolutely worthless invention of the scholarly mind."[21]

Grensted, Buttrick, and others recognize that the defense of religion by logical argument has proved singularly unconvincing. And this is as it should be, states the former, for an attempt to demonstrate God's existence reduces Him to the status of an inference. But it is not

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[21] Ibid., p. 437. James feels very strongly about dogmatic formulas which originate in scholarly minds--no doubt with some justification. We append some of his statements on the subject: "I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue. . . . When I call theological formulas secondary products, I mean that in a world in which no religious feeling had ever existed, I doubt whether any philosophic theology could ever have been framed. I doubt if dispassionate intellectual contemplation of the universe, apart from inner unhappiness and need of deliverance on the one hand and mystical emotion on the other, would ever have resulted in religious philosophies such as we now possess. . . . But high-flying speculations like those of either dogmatic or idealistic theology, these they would have had no motive to venture on, feeling no need of commerce with such deities. These speculations must, it seems to me, be classed as over-beliefs, buildings-out performed by the intellect into directions of which feeling originally supplied the hint." Ibid., p. 422.

in an inference that we live, and move, and have our being. God is nearer to us than that.[22] Buttrick asks if we would wish to join the strange Missouri chorus of, "Prove it to me," refusing to believe until the mind has been battered to a pulp by unanswerable arguments. "Such proof is not proof," he writes, "but dark coercion; and the resultant belief is not belief, but slavery."[23] "We cannot prove truth by logic, for inevitably we assume truth in order to integrate logic. We cannot prove God by man, for He is the axiom by which alone men can live. The saints prove God by the adventure of prayer."[24]

It is agreeably surprising to note some of Carl Jung's statements on

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[22]Grensted, op. cit., p. 71.

[23]Buttrick, op. cit., p. 130.

[24]Ibid., p. 189. It is interesting, though rather discouraging, to note the Wiemans' glorification of pure reason in this matter. Out of the depths of their "scientific" mind they bring forth statements such as these: "Since the old system of thinking and practice can no longer be used to validate prayer, and no new system has been developed, there is a strong tendency on the part of some to abjure all reasoning as a basis for justifying prayer and religion. There is a widespread turning to the irrational, especially among sophisticated, thinking people who want to hold to their religion and pray. They have found something in prayer that is for them too precious to relinquish. . . . There is something irrational that is more important than anything reason can comprehend--so they 'reason' to themselves. Consequently we have in many circles today a glorification of the irrational which some try to justify by reason." Wieman, op. cit., p. 130. It seems that the Wiemans are discovering for the first time that praying Christians are not claiming to use reason as a justification for their prayers; and they regard their discovery as a new and revolutionary departure. Actually it was ever thus. Nowhere does the New Testament spend valuable space and time in a rational justification of prayer; it simply refers to prayer as the natural activity of the man in Christ, and mentions the promises of God which are attached thereto. This is not an irrational approach to the subject; perhaps un-rational would be a better word. The Wiemans do not seem to realize that in their pride of pure reason they have left the reassuring company of many of their fellow psychologists, and have embarked on their own little program of adolescent rationalism.

this matter of faith and reason--surprising in view of his dream of the collective unconscious on which he bases whatever he has of theology.

> However far-fetched it may sound, experience shows that many neuroses are caused by the fact that people blind themselves to their own religious promptings because of a childish passion for rational enlightenment.
>
> But to believe has become today such a difficult art, that people, and particularly the educated part of humanity, can hardly find their way there. They have become too accustomed to the thought that, with regard to immortality and such questions, there are many contradictory opinions and no convincing proofs. Since "science" has become the catchword which carries the weight of conviction in the contemporary world, we ask for "scientific" proofs. But educated people who can think, know that proof of this kind is out of the question. We simply know nothing about it.
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> . . . theology demands faith, and faith cannot be made: it is in the truest sense a gift of grace.[25]

No doubt the conclusion is valid, then, that it is worse than useless to try to deduce God and communion with Him from "causality" or "purpose," or to infer Him from "the Good, the Beautiful, and the True." As they stand, these are mere Platonic abstractions, "the torn remnants of His seamless robe."[26] There is little danger that we shall lose God. As long as life lasts, He will take Christians unawares.

Mysticism

There has been much misunderstanding with regard to mysticism; this may be largely due to the fact that the term itself admits of at least two definitions. This circumstance is happily taken into account in the

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[25]Carl G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, translated by W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., n.d.), pp. 77, 128, 140.

[26]Buttrick, op. cit., p. 62.

German language, which distinguishes between Mystik, the true religious attitude, and Mysticismus, its debased and spurious imitation.[27]

However, there are certain psychological peculiarities which are common to both Mystik and Mysticismus. One of these marks by which a state of mind may be classified as mystical is negative: The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that words can not give an adequate report of its contents. It follows from this that its quality must be experienced directly; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than they are like states of intellect, according to James.[28] Mystical truth exists for the individual who has the experience, but for no one else; for it seems to be a "super-human, unspeakable reality experience that makes all human words and terms seem shallow and bleak, as in the case of some of the writings and expressions of the Apostle Paul, Thomas A. Kempis, Chr. Scriver, Johann Gerhardt, Brorson, Pascal, Hudson Taylor, and many other Christian classics."[29]

Another simple rudiment of mystical experience would seem to be that deepened sense of the significance of a maxim or formula which occasionally sweeps over the experient. Sometimes we exclaim, "I've heard that said all my life, but I never fully realized its meaning until just now."

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[27]Cf. James S. Stewart, A Man in Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion (New York & London: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 161.

[28]James, op. cit., p. 371.

[29]Norborg, op. cit., p. 76.

> "When a fellow-monk," said Luther, "one day repeated the words of the Creed: 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins,' I saw the Scripture in an entirely new light; and straightway I felt as if I were born anew. It was as if I had found the door of paradise thrown wide open."[30]

Another characteristic of mystical experience is a "feeling of enlargement, union, and emancipation."[31] James concludes from his extensive investigations that the "affective experience" brings with it a loss of worry, a sense of ultimate well-being, contentment with existing conditions, peace, harmony, willingness, and acquiescence. There is the sense of perceiving truths not known before; some of the mysteries of life become lucid. And the world appears to undergo an objective change--an appearance of newness beautifies every object.[32]

But it must be remembered that the psychological characteristics which we have mentioned to delineate the lowest common denominator of mysticism are not in themselves peculiarly Christian. They are capable of forming alliances with the most diverse philosophies and theologies, provided those systems can find a place in their framework for the basic emotional mood of mysticism. Thus it would not be right to invoke its prestige as distinctively in favor of any special belief. Norborg believes that it is legitimate to treat mystical religion as a specific type of a well-nigh universal religious experience. He feels that a mystic is a mystic, no matter what his religious background; and in rather strong terms he declares: "Mysticism can never be 'Christianized'

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[30] James, op. cit., p. 373.

[31] Ibid., p. 416 f.

[32] Ibid., p. 242 f.

or made Islamitic--it remains that non-geographical, non-historical, non-racial homeland of all the lovely saints of the Oneness cult."[33]

It is certainly true that the type of mysticism which is nothing more than an absolute psychic egotism has nothing to do with the Christian religion. In such an experience God becomes only a name for a certain "absolute" experience; He is drawn together with someone's ego in that experience. "It is, therefore, only logical," says Norborg again, "when a great mystic mockingly, despairingly cries out: 'God, when I die, you die.' Here, in a classic way, the identity of 'God' with the mystic's ego is admitted."[34] The Christian's relationship by faith to God is radically different from any conception which interprets it as a relation of identity between God and man, as we shall point out later in this chapter. When mysticism tries to make this relationship an identity, it not only destroys the true fellowship with God, but it also destroys the remoteness or otherness of God. Aulen explains this point with a penetrating insight as follows:

> The "god" whom man reaches on this way and the "infinity" into which he is plunged do not carry him outside the charmed circle of egocentricity. Just as the God of mysticism becomes simply the unfathomable, about which nothing can be said, so this "god" loses the power to lift man out of himself and to "remove him from his own line of vision." Absorption into the divine becomes in reality nothing but absorption into self. But at the same time, in spite of its talk about man's "negation of self," mysticism removes the "distance" between God and man which is a fundamental fact for Christian faith, and which increases in and through this fellowship."[35]

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[33] Norborg, op. cit., p. 75.

[34] Ibid., p. 70.

[35] Gustaf Aulen, The Faith of the Christian Church, translated from the fourth Swedish edition by Eric H. Wahlstrom and G. Everett Arden (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1948), p. 317.

This identification of the soul with God is an outstanding feature of Hinduism, and especially of the practice of Yoga. The highest and best prayer becomes the prayer of simplicity, in which all volition seems to be lost. The soul is utterly wrapped in the contemplation of some divine vision. It sinks into a condition of Nirvana, passes up the Unitive Way, and seems to be one with God.[36] In describing this state of identification with deity, the Asiatic mystic sometimes uses language which is actually meaningless and absurd in spite of its superficial subtlety. For instance, one of them writes:

> I am the mast, the rudder, the steersman and the ship;
> I am the coral reef on which it founders.[37]

Another interesting example of this celestial absurdity is found in a poem by Yogananda, the Indian mystic who founded the so-called Self-Realization Fellowship in the United States. He describes the ecstatic state of samadhi (complete concentration) in the following glowing words:

> Present, past, future, no more for me,
> But ever-present, all-flowing I, I, everywhere . . .
> Thoughts of all men, past, present, to come,
> Every blade of grass, myself, mankind,
> Each particle of universal dust,
> Anger, greed, good, bad, salvation, lust,
> I swallowed, transmuted all
> Into a vast ocean of blood of my own one Being! . . .
> Thou art I, I am Thou,
> Knowing, Knower, Known, as One! . . .

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[36] Cf. Grensted, op. cit., p. 87.

[37] Quoted by W. R. Inge, Mysticism in Religion (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1948), p. 156. Inge ascribes this excerpt to a certain Jelaleddin.

> The sparrow, each grain of sand, fall not without My sight.
> All space floats like an iceberg in My mental sea,
> Colossal Container, I, of all things made. . . .[38]

This should be enough to indicate that such mysticism is nothing but monstrous megalomania; or at least "it is so personal and subjectivistic that it should be classified as religiosity rather than as a religion."[39]

On the other hand, the true Christian mysticism which the German refers to as Mystik, wherein both the fellowship with God and the otherness of God are duly taken into account--this mysticism is best comprehended in St. Paul's concept of union with Christ, a concept which he frequently articulates in the phrase "in Christ" or its equivalent. Indeed, Inge maintains that "if we regard mysticism not merely as a personal experience, but as a thought-out philosophy of life, a spiritual interpretation of reality, it is St. Paul whom we must regard as the founder of Christian mysticism."[40] This mysticism, when equated with union with Christ, is of the essence in Christianity; Stewart believes that only when union with Christ is kept central is sanctification seen in its true nature, as the unfolding of Christ's own character within the believer's life. And only thus is the relationship between religion and ethics properly understood. Actually, then, the whole meaning of the Atonement is here at stake.[41]

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[38]Paramhansa Yogananda, Autobiography of a Yogi (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1946), p. 153 f.

[39]Norborg, op. cit., p. 132.

[40]Inge, op. cit., p. 32.

[41]Stewart, op. cit., p. 152 f. For an excellent discussion of the concept of union with Christ, cf. the chapter entitled, "Mysticism and Morality," pp. 147-203.

But even within the range of the true Christian mysticism there are observable differences and variations in the intensity of the experience. For example, Paul describes a time when he was transported into Paradise;[42] it will be noted, however, that he definitely dates the experience--it happened fourteen years before his account of it was written. This seems to indicate that he regarded the experience as an exceptional one, even for his own career; it was not the level on which he habitually lived; the rapture and ecstasy came and passed. And although he thinks of it as a very special event, he does not mean thereby to disparage the more prosaic experiences of souls "hid with Christ in God."[43] For it is that daily, ever-renewed communion with God, rather than the transient rapture, which comprises the inmost nature of Christianity; this is the true mysticism, for it is the heart of essential religion. We agree with Stewart, who says that in some degree every true Christian is a mystic in the Pauline sense.[44] Inge goes a step further: "In truth the typical mystical experience is just prayer. Anyone who has really prayed, and felt that his prayers are heard, knows what mysticism means."[45] For it is certainly better to set one's sights lower and find prayer meaningful than to long for a climactic experience which may never come. Grensted comments:

But for the Christian it is a matter of quite equal concern that

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[42] 2 Cor. 12:1-10.

[43] Col. 3:3.

[44] Stewart, op. cit., p. 162.

[45] Inge, Vale, 38, as quoted ibid., n. 2.

> his faith should not be supposed to rest upon bizarre and supra-normal experiences occurring, with no great regularity, in the lives of certain exceptional persons, who cannot, as it appears, even tell us exactly what those experiences have been.[46]

The type of mysticism which we have equated with union with Christ bears no resemblance whatever to the notion of identity with God. In Gal. 2:20 Paul guards against any possible pantheistic interpretation by reasserting the relationship wherein I and Thou stand over against each other. It is true, he says, that "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." But he adds, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." Paul's view certainly is that when Christ possesses a man, that man does not thereby cease to be himself. Rather, for the first time he comes to himself, like the prodigal son. Christian experience does not depersonalize men and reduce them to a monotonous uniformity; rather it heightens every individual power they have. Paul's own amazing career is convincing evidence of this fact. One could hardly attribute the terrific impact that he made on men and nations to a lack of individuality.[47]

Emotion

The whole man is the religious man, and the religious man is the whole man. According to Christianity, it is the whole self which is called to turn towards God, not some supposed "spiritual" part thereof. "It is the <u>whole man</u> of intellect, of felling, and of will, which finds

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[46]Grensted, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 213.

[47]<u>Cf.</u> Stewart, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 167.

its only true objective in the Christian God."[48] The Christian religion is a matter between the soul or self, and God--in other words, it is life, and all of life, and nothing more nor less. Grensted urges this point strongly: "To isolate part of life and to call it religious, is to degrade life and to destroy religion. That is why the God of our worship calims all or nothing. A divided allegiance He may not accept, if He is to be God."[49] And since prayer is inseparable from the life of faith, it should take up and turn to God all the powers of our mental, emotional, and volitional life.

Since the religious man--the praying man--is the whole man, the emotions of that man dare not be ignored. For all the emotions of a man play their part in his religion and prayer life; with some the emotion of joy plays a prominent part, with others the emotion of sadness, or determination, or resignation, depending on the temper of his personality. But these feelings can not be eliminated, for, as Ligon declares, "When emotions are left out of religion, it does not mean that they have been left out of the individuals who profess that religion. It means that religion ceases to have any important influence on personality."[50] This is certainly evident from the vigorous and total manner in which the heroes of faith have given themselves over to things spiritual. In them can be seen the noblest emotions operating on

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[48]Evelyn Underhill, The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1920), p. 101.

[49]Grensted, op. cit., p. 19.

[50]Ernest M. Ligon, The Psychology of Christian Personality (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), p. 341.

the highest levels, "not by the faultless deductions of dialectic, but by the mysterious logic of the heart."[51] And what has this to do with prayer? Miss Underhill states the case perhaps a bit too strongly, but she speaks to the point:

> Prayer, then, on its emotional side should begin in humble contrition and flower in loving adoration. Adoring love--not mere emotional excitement, religious sentimentality or "spiritual feelings" --but the strong, deep love, industrious, courageous and self-giving which fuses all the powers of the self into one single state of enormous intensity; this is the immortal element of prayer.[52]

Miss Harkness believes too that commitment to God in prayer ought to be charged with powerful lifting emotion. It ought to be restrained in expression but never feeble; for she feels that the fear of being "too emotional" has perhaps done more than anything else except self-centeredness to cut the roots from under religion and produce secularism and worldliness.[53]

It must be remembered, however, that the validity of Christianity can never rest upon such emotional experiences, nor can their psychology be used for apologetic purposes. The reality of God, that is, the truth of the revelation, has <u>faith</u> for its counterpart and not experience. And Christian faith, though it expresses itself in Christian experience,

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[51]Underhill, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 110.

[52]<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 111.

[53]Georgia Harkness, <u>Prayer and the Common Life</u> (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1948), p. 82.

does not rest thereon.[54] It would be finally disastrous for religion if its validity were ever made to depend on the interpretation of certain special types of experience. Even the sense of the numinous which Otto describes,[55] although it has a peculiar quality of impressiveness, can not be regarded as a vindication of Christian faith; its value at most is that it calls our attention to the element of otherness which permeates every part and aspect of our life.[56] Norborg speaks the language of Christian faith on this subject when he states:

> The Christian himself cannot explain why he became a Christian; he will answer God. But that answer is not a psychological or rational answer, because God does not have a place in the psychic makeup of our little life. He is not an "explanation" or a "cause" or a "reason," according to our rational standards. Whatever experiences the Christian may have, none of them, not even the highest and most celestial, is a "proof" of God. To the Christian, God is not experience, He is my Lord.[57]

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[54]Cf. Norborg, op. cit., p. 8. Cf. also Grensted, op. cit., p. 209, n. 2, where he quotes Coe's article, "The Sources of the Mystical Revelation," in the Hibbert Journal for January, 1908, as follows: "The mystic acquires his religious convictions precisely as his non-mystical neighbour does, namely, through tradition and instruction grown habitual, and reflective analysis. The mystic brings his theological beliefs to the mystical experience; he does not derive them from it." In contrast to these conclusions, cf. Inge, op. cit. As nearly as can be determined, the basic premise of Inge's work is that personal inner experience is the only source from which religion can draw its life.

[55]Cf. Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, translated from the German by John W. Harvey (2nd edition; London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

[56]Cf. Grensted, op. cit., p. 220.

[57]Norborg, op. cit., p. 272.

CHAPTER IV

GOD AS THE IMPULSE FOR PRAYER

The impulse to pray does not originate in man--neither in his emotions, nor in the subliminal region of his mind, nor in the dream fantasies of the race. Prayer must be conceived of as theocentric. It is an impulse implanted in man the creature by a personal God.

Origins

In the section on pragmatism in the previous chapter, we took issue with the pragmatic psychology of James, when we maintained that the origin of a religious experience is certainly a valid criterion of its value.

This is true also of the prayer experience. However, it is equally true that the historical origins of prayer as scientific psychology conceives of them are questionable, misleading, and sometimes entirely false when employed to impart the essential nature of prayer. Even if it were ever possible to trace such origins, it would be quite another matter to say that they could yield central meanings. Medicine would thus be reduced to the incantations of a masked wizard; music would become the barking of a jungle beast; a cathedral would be a hole in a mountain-side. "This cult of origins, the strange assumption that priority in time gives clearer meanings and truer evaluations, leads almost inevitably to oversimplification--as, for instance to the notion that prayer began in fear or that religion is merely a tribal

custom."[1]

Some of the scientific psychologists apparently believe that man first started to pray in response to some primal impulse, either for any kind of help in dire need or in spontaneous praise and jubilation. They feel that man first prayed without thinking exactly why or to whom. Just as, for instance, he found himself engaged in political activity before he developed an idea of the state, so he found himself praying before he had a distinct idea of God.[2] Such theories, lacking as they are in depth and profundity, can hardly explain the intimate personal relationship with God that characterizes prayer according to the New Testament. Furthermore, such theories give a mistaken notion of progress, implying as they do that the acme of evolution occurs when a full-size system has been developed.

It is rather surprising to note that the Wiemans, in spite of their distinctly sub-Christian approach to religion, at least concede that prayer did not develop out of a prior practice of magic. But they do think that "prayer and magic are two different lines of development that may proceed from the original, unpremeditated outreachings and strivings which we have described."[3]

Other theorists contend that prayer is animistic fear--stark fear in early times, and refined fear today--primitive terror in any case.

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[1]George A. Buttrick, Prayer (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1942), p. 27.

[2]Cf. Henry Nelson Wieman and Regina Westcott-Wieman, Normative Psychology of Religion (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, c.1935), p. 129.

[3]Ibid., p. 131.

Alfred Maury glibly asserts: "Fear is the father of religion and love its late-born daughter."[4] Thus to hypothesize fear as the original element of prayer is at best an unprovable dogmatism. Brightman points out that although fear is natural, it alone is not religious and never can be religious. He continues:

> In so far as religious believers come to be entirely dominated by fear in their attitude toward God, they have ceased to be religious; they are merely terrorized victims of power. Fear is not religious unless it is fear of goodness and justice. A cosmic power is not God merely because it inspires fear; it is God only if it embodies true values--goodness, beauty, truth, and holiness. It may well be that weak and sinful man may tremble with fear in the presence of perfect goodness; such fear is a religious fear. But it is religious not because it is fear but because it is in the presence of perfect and eternal goodness.[5]

Sometimes scientific psychology gibes at prayer as nothing more than an escape from reality. But that accusation foolishly assumes that man is self-sufficient and needs no refuse--a hollow pretense in a world where microbes are stronger than man, where sorrow and death stalk with violence, and where an aroused conscience can sting like a scorpion. As Buttrick comments, "The critic who prates about 'escape' does not make his bed in the street on a stormy night."[6]

Thus as stated above, no man can safely dogmatize about the origin

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[4]Quoted by Buttrick, on. cit., p. 43.

[5]Edgar Sheffield Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1945), p. 463. Cf. also Nicolas Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, translated from the Russian by R. M. French (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1944), p. 250: "Fear can be a more exalted condition than heedless submersion in everyday things. But fear, fear of all sorts, is all the same a form of human slavery. Perfect love casteth out fear. Fearlessness is the highest state. Slavish fear hinders the revelation of truth. Fear gives birth to lies."

[6]Buttrick, on. cit., p. 22.

of so deep and personal a communion as prayer; besides the essential nature of prayer, whatever its origins, is not shown in its historical beginnings. "The nature of a hyacinth is seen not in the bulb but in the bloom."[7]

Prayer and Autosuggestion

One of the most frequent explanations of prayer given by modern psychology is that it is purely a subjective discipline, a mere method of autosuggestion. It is a soliloquy whose only objective answer is the echo of its own sound. It is a valuable self-discipline, an inverted form of self-reliance.[8] And it is quite true--the modern man may practice prayer in exactly this way. Psychology has taught him something of what he can do to himself in the way of curing certain ills through the control of thoughts and feelings, through the development of confidence and courage and other positive habits and attitudes.[9] It is certainly true that the man who says, "I shall fail," is already on the road to failure; while he who whispers to himself, "I can," is already on the road to triumph. Thus the scientific psychologist may regard prayer as a "'healthy lie of life' which pours new confidence into the reservoirs of the subconscious."[10]

It is true, many do practice "prayer" in this way only. But this

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[7] Ibid., p. 44.

[8] Cf. ibid., p. 49.

[9] Cf. Wieman, op. cit., p. 134.

[10] Buttrick, loc. cit.

is certainly a far cry from prayer in the New Testament sense--communion with God in the name of Jesus Christ. Although some who are unwittingly giving themselves autosuggestions might call it prayer, it is doubtful whether any sane man who is quite aware that he is engaging in autosuggestion would call it prayer to God. Therefore it would seem that when the athlete says with gritted teeth, "God help me make this touchdown," he is really not praying at all but making himself a morale lecture.[11]

This position--that prayer is mere autosuggestion--can be demonstrated to be untenable. For example, Buttrick points out that if prayer were only a "healthy lie" (supposing lies could ever be healthy), it would soon be detected, and noble spirits would renounce it. It would hardly have found prominence in the lives of the great and influential saints of Christendom, much less in the life of Christ Himself. It might have endured a generation, but it could hardly have been an agelong rapture; for those heroes of faith who prayed with power would have instantly repudiated any self-deception.[12] Relton states the case in this way: The religious relationship is always held to be a relation between a human subject and a God who is actually existent; when this belief breaks down, religion breaks down. Therefore, if prayer were merely a form of autosuggestion and nothing else, it has existed all these years because all mankind was ignorant of the fact that it was autosuggestion; for if the fact were recognised, it would have been

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[11]Ernest M. Ligon, The Psychology of Christian Personality (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), p. 179.

[12]Buttrick, loc. cit.

instantly fatal to prayer and religion.[13] But it is hardly likely that all of the people could be thus deceived all of the time. Pratt says mischievously: "If the subjective value of prayer be all the value it has, we wise psychologists of religion had best keep the fact to ourselves; otherwise the game will soon be up and we shall have no religion to psychologize about. We shall have killed the goose that laid our golden egg."[14]

Furthermore, the strength and courage which can result from prayer could not be ascribed to mere autosuggestion, especially if it were to be assumed that the person praying did not realize he was practicing autosuggestion. Dr. Bruce declares that every saintly life, the longer it is lived, finds prayer ever more helpful. And the explanation is not found in illusion (i.e. autosuggestion), which is weakening, but in the power that results from prayer. Illusion would exhaust the spiritual energies; it would depress and end in doubt. But the power of prayer is a confirmation of resolution and a strengthening of morality. "Such moral forces," continues Bruce, "do not spring out of auto-suggestion. They have their source in something more firm and abiding than subjectivity or the subliminal consciousness. That source is nothing less than Reality."[15] Ligon argues in a similar manner:

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[13] H. M. Relton, "The Psychology of Prayer and Religious Experience," Psychology and the Church, edited by O. Hardman (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), p. 88.

[14] J. B. Pratt, The Religious Consciousness, p. 336, as quoted by Georgia Harkness, Prayer and the Common Life (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1948), p. 29.

[15] W. S. Bruce, Psychology of Christian Life and Behavior, as quoted by Relton, op. cit., p. 93 f.

> To have the deepest confidence that there is a God, who does hear and answer one's prayer, forms a basis for a courage which makes a man able to meet many of life's severest trials with mental poise. On the other hand, to hold the belief that this is a purely mechanical universe, which has no heart and is utterly unfriendly, has led many a man to a suicide of hopelessness. Just by way of philosophical reflection, would it not be paradoxical if a lawful universe were so ordered that to believe in its true nature would be mentally unhealthy, and to hold a delusion as to its constitution should be the road to mental health?[16]

The argument, in short, is that an experience of prayer and fellowship with God which produces such revolutionary results in human life has a right to the name of reality, and is hardly covered by the explanation of autosuggestion.

The theory of prayer as autosuggestion is hardly adequate to explain the radical love which so often motivates prayer. Jesus humbled Himself unto the death of the cross, and He prayed there: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."[17] Under a shower of crushing stones, Stephen prayed: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."[18] The critic who insists that those prayers were addressed to a white-bearded product of the imagination called God, or that they were a form of autosuggestion, places himself into a most vulnerable position

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[16]Ligon, op. cit., p. 152 f.

[17]Luke 23:34.

[18]Acts 7:60.

and under the severest judgment.[19]

In conclusion to this section, we submit that a review of the phenomena of the prayer life, the true mystical experience both in its milder and more intense forms, and religious experience generally, justifies the rejection of the hypothesis that it can all be accounted for adequately as the fruits of self-contemplation, self-communion, self-introspection, autosuggestion, or subjective illusion of a purely psychological nature.[20]

God as Personal

It will appear from the previous section that whether the reference in prayer is objective or subjective depends entirely on one's conception of God. The Biblical description presents a personal God who is at once transcendent and immanent. It is on this very point that the opinions of many modern psychologists are weighed in the balances of New Testament theology and found wanting.

William James is at least honest enough in his investigation to

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[19]The Wiemans have a rather whimsical idea of what is meant by the objective reference in prayer: "But prayer is not subjective but objective if one means to ask whether any reality is reached by means of prayer which is greater than the personality itself. Prayer does reach such a reality. The growth of meaningful and mutually sustaining connections is far wider and fuller than the single personality. Furthermore it is superhuman." Wieman, op. cit., p. 140. At the risk of passing a snap judgment, we would submit that this is Platonic idealism at its most incomprehensible; and it is particularly unbecoming in a writer, who, from every indication, wishes to be a strict scientific naturalist.

[20]Cf. Relton, op. cit., p. 105.

perceive and state this issue. He feels that psychology and religion are in perfect harmony up to this point, since both believe that there are forces seemingly outside of the conscious individual that bring redemption to his life. But he says that psychology defines these forces as "subconscious," implying that they do not transcend the individual's personality; by this psychology diverges from Christian theology, which predicates these forces of direct supernatural operations of the Deity.[21] In other words, James equates God with the subconscious mind. But he does not believe that the issue is an important one. It is sufficient for him that in the process of communion with God energy from on high flows in to meet demand and becomes operative in the phenomenal world; the important thing is that this operativeness is admitted to be real, that spiritual energy becomes active and effects some kind of spiritual work--but for James it makes no essential difference whether its immediate effects be subjective or objective.[22]

Similarly, Starbuck discounts the idea of a personal, objective God. He admits the need of self-surrender; but he thinks that the theological maxim, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," acknowledges the same fact as the psychological maxim, "Let one do all in one's power, and one's nervous system will do the rest."[23] Evidently Starbuck

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[21]William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: The Modern Library, c.1902), p. 207.

[22]Ibid., p. 467.

[23]E. D. Starbuck, The Psychology of Religion, as quoted by Sv. Norborg, Varieties of Christian Experience (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, c.1937), p. 177.

imagines that "God" is a mere old-fashioned theological name for the nervous system, an objectivation of the relation between the ego and the super-ego, "the hawk of super-ego throwing itself like lightning on that poor psychic ego of mine."[24]

The Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, apparently feels that religious experience (presumably this includes prayer) is the fruit of certain temperaments in the case of persons of varied intelligence and culture. Specifically, it is the expression of the dream fantasies of the race or the subconscious desires of the individual. In his Psychology of the Unconscious, Jung finds the true explanation of Christianity in racial dreams, thus reducing it to an illusion, the creation of the experiencing mind.[25] Summing up, we could safely say that for Jung, God equals the collective unconscious as expressed in racial dreams.

The Wiemans blandly and categorically deny that the objective reference in prayer can be to a superrational deity, let alone a personal God. Such an idea is a defensive device, in their opinion, "developed to protect the practice of prayer when the old ideas which sustained it can no longer stand in the face of what we now know about the world."[26] One can only comment that "pure science" had best beware this dangerous pride in "what we now know about the world." What do we now know? The Wiemans know what God is: "God is the growth of meaning and value in the world. This growth consists of increase in those

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[24] Ibid., p. 77.

[25] Reference from Relton, op. cit., p. 73 f.

[26] Wieman, op. cit., p. 136.

connections between activities which make the activities mutually sustaining, mutually enhancing and mutually meaningful."[27]

From the above statements the weakness of pure psychology is evident: It is entirely anthropocentric; it makes man the end of the study instead of God. Its system of values has no validity for the Christian; for at the very outset of his faith the Christian disclaims a god who is in any sense a reflection of himself, fashioned in the image of man.[28] The love of God manifested in His Son, Jesus Christ, is altogether too tremendous and revolutionary a concept to be explained in terms of autosuggestion or some other purely psychic process. Nygren speaks to this point: "The love of God is to Paul (or all apostles!) not a creation of his own spirit, but only a report on something that really has happened . . . . God has revealed His love through the giving of His Son. Here the love of God meets us not only as a conception, but as the all-overpowering Reality."[29]

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[27]Ibid., p. 137. It is amazing that on the very same page the Wiemans refer to the "present confusion in thought about God." Brightman, on the other hand, realizes the importance of a personal God as the object of prayer: "If God is not a conscious person, then prayer is only a dramatization of meditation, and its second-personal form is illusory. To say 'thou' to an unconscious power is a misuse of terms." And he adds, to substitute other terms for the personal pronouns would only suggest "the religious unnaturalness and the philosophical inadequacy of impersonal conceptions of God." Brightman, op. cit., p. 425.

[28]Cf. L. W. Grensted, Psychology and God: A Study of the Implications of Recent Psychology for Religious Belief and Practice (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), p. 61. Cf. also Berdyaev, op. cit., p. 248: "The final liberation is possible only through a bond between the human spirit and the Spirit of God. Spiritual liberation is always a turning to a profounder depth than the spiritual principle in man, it is a turning to God."

[29]Anders Nygren, Den Kristna Kaerlekstanken, I, p. 89, as quoted by Norborg, op. cit., p. 273.

But to say that the God who answers prayer is an objective reality is not to say that God is a fearsome Being, utterly transcendent, and completely foreign to our little world. Stolz points out with a fine insight that our attitude toward God can not be completed in a single mood or conception. At the root of our religion lies a mystery which alternately exalts and humbles us, which both attracts and overwhelms us. For our faith is a union of tender, close elements and awesome elements; it clings to a God who is as close to us as our own spirit, and at the same time wholly Other.[30] He is immanent and inspires trust, for He is our Father; but He is transcendent and inspires awe, for He is in heaven.

Thus God is transcendent and objective; but He is also immanent and personal, and He hears and responds to prayer. Even if the response is within the individual who prays and can be described in psychological terms, it is still God's response. For it is through our mental and moral processes--though not in identity with them--that God makes Himself known to us. It is "the Beyond that is within" that speaks, and in that sense God's disclosure of Himself through the inner voice is as

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[30]Karl R. Stolz, Pastoral Psychology (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, c.1932), p. 156. Cf. also Grensted, op. cit., p. 12.

real and objective as anything in nature.[31] St. Paul writes: "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. . . . Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words."[32] It is He who does it; yet it is we who do it. Paul points out the connecting link when he testifies: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."[33]

Aulen explains this well by saying that prayer is at once a human act of turning to God and a divine act by which God draws man to Himself.[34]

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[31]Cf. Harkness, op. cit., pp. 66, 169 f. Cf. also Leslie D. Weatherhead, Psychology in Service of the Soul (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), p. 72 f.: "It would be impossible for the ego to do anything apart from the power of God. It is God at such a depth of our personality that we cannot distinguish between Himself and ourselves. It is allowing the God imprisoned within to rise up and function. It must be remembered that God is not only exterior to the self, but its inhabitant, and it is the God functioning within us that leads us to any desire or achievement. Christianity has always held the doctrine of the Divine Immanence, and it is His spirit within us which in the first place gave us the machinery of the personality which we call the power of auto-suggestion and which leads us to desire improvement." It is possible that Weatherhead has the right idea when he makes these remarks. However, it must be admitted that if his description of God's operation within the Christian is a true one, that operation of God can not be equated with psychology's conception of autosuggestion; for unbelievers, too, are capable of using autosuggestion and even desiring improvement, yet it can not be said that it is the "God within them" that moves them to such activity.

[32]Rom. 8:15.16.26.

[33]Gal. 2:20 (A. V.).

[34]Gustaf Aulen, The Faith of the Christian Church, translated from the fourth Swedish edition by Eric H. Wahlstrom and G. Everett Arden (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1948), p. 402.

This intimate give-and-take communion, which may be referred to as an I-Thou relationship whose point of contact is Christ, is poignantly illustrated in the experience of Luther:

> . . . kommt wohl oft, dasz ich in einem Stück oder Bitte in so reiche Gedanken zu spazieren komme, dasz ich die andern sechs lasse alle anstehen. Und wenn auch solche reichen guten Gedanken kommen, so soll man die andern Gebete fahren lassen und solchen Gedanken Raum geben und mit Stille zuhören und beileibe nicht hindern, denn da predigt der Heilige Geist selber. Und seiner Predigt Ein Wort ist weit, weit besser, denn unserer Gebete tausend. Und ich habe auch also oft mehr gelernt in Einem Gebet, weder ich aus viel Lesen und Dichten hätte kriegen können.[35]

Creaturehood

A personal God stands on the one side of this I-Thou relationship in prayer. Man the creature stands on the other. In this I-Thou relationship, the pray-er must be aware of "Thou" as God, personal yet transcendent, as explained above; furthermore, he must be aware of "I" as creature, utterly dependent on God. This feeling of dependence--creature-consciousness, creature-feeling--is described by Rudolf Otto in these words: "It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."[36] The chief element in this feeling, according to Otto, is best described by the expression tremendum mysterium, mystery, terror, and fascination blended into awe.[37]

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[35]Martin Luther, "Wie man beten soll?" Dr. Martin Luther's Sämmtliche Schriften, X, herausgegeben von Dr. Joh. Georg Walch (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1885), p. 1400.

[36]Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, translated from the German by John W. Harvey (2nd edition; London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 10.

[37]Ibid., pp. 12 ff.

This may be further defined as fear mingled with respect. We stand in awe before God when our fear of Him has been modified and tempered by wholesome esteem and deference. There are many admonitions in the Bible to fear God; but to fear God in the Biblical sense is not to stand in His presence filled with a superstitious and panicky dread. It is rather to render Him loyal and intelligent obedience and respect.[38]

This concept of creaturehood expresses a fundamental Christian principle, the principle of the dependence of man's life upon God, and its goal in God.[39] This is not a blind fatalism or a resigned pessimism; it is Christian realism, for, as Norborg writes: "Christians willingly admit that they have been driven to God because they themselves cannot master themselves."[40] Augustine's oft-quoted statement from his Confessions apparently refers to this principle: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."

Examples from the Bible may illustrate the point. Abraham certainly realized his creaturehood when he interceded for the wicked city of Sodom: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes."[41] Jacob felt his creaturehood at Jabbok, where he wrestled all night with God; in his past was a deceived old father and a cheated brother, and in the future was a meeting with that brother. His cry was the cry of man who is weak and can not find the way or walk

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[38]Cf. Stolz, op. cit., p. 155.

[39]Cf. Grensted, op. cit., p. 6.

[40]Norborg, op. cit., p. 269.

[41]Gen. 18:27.

alone: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."[42] And one of David's prayers expresses this same profound Christian psychology: "O Lord, thou has searched me, and known me. . . . Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."[43]

In petitionary prayer it is especially evident that prayer is the cry of creaturehood. Such prayer is usually offered *in extremis*, springing naturally from great need or danger. It is man's finiteness in weakness or guilt, begging for strength and forgiveness. It says, "God, save me!" and it means, "Save me from this flood!" or "Save me from this fire!"[44] Perhaps Christians should strive to outgrow such prayers, for ideally speaking, "the prayer of faith for God's protection is not a prayer to be delivered from suffering and grief, but a prayer that God will preserve us *in* all danger and harm, and above all that God's dominion may be realized."[45] But it is unlikely that man will completely outgrow such petition until he outgrows his earthbound creaturehood.

This unescapable fact of creaturehood points up one of the weaknesses of much of modern psychiatry. Psychiatry assumes that if hidden motives can be brought to light and recognized by the patient for what they are, he has the power to set his own house in order, with the help of the

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[42]Gen. 32:26.

[43]Ps. 139:1.23.24. On this subject, *cf.* Chapter II of this thesis, where prayer is described as an acknowledgement of utter dependence upon God, *supra*, p. 6.

[44]*Cf.* Buttrick, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

[45]Aulen, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

self-confidence which the psychiatrist has built up in him. Such an assumption is partly true; for as long as a man is at all responsible, he is not helpless. And he can also use the kind of help that a fellow human who is a psychiatrist can give. But the assumption is not wholly true. For man can not stand alone, nor can any psychiatrist build enough self-confidence in men who are under defect of will and sentence of death.[46] We agree with Buttrick: "The psychiatrist cannot save us, nor the preacher. He also is only a man, and himself wounded in conscience. He, the creature, has no wit to play the Creator. He cannot make or remake the soul."[47] Power does not come merely from within the man, but from beyond him. Power comes from God through Christ. And in prayer, we creatures draw such power from God the Creator.

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[46] Cf. Buttrick, op. cit., pp. 147, 167 f.

[47] Ibid., p. 213.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Prayer must be intelligently grounded. This is evident from a description of prayer according to the New Testament. Prayer must rest on a solid theological foundation.

True Christian prayer must be offered in Christ's name: because it is the speech of a faith that has Christ and His Atonement for its object; because through Christ we are reconciled to God; because we are completely dependent on Christ for fullness of life, as the branch is to the Vine; because every prayer implies a confession of sins and forgiveness through Christ; because it must follow Christ's pattern of sincerity, understanding, concentration, selfless love, thanksgiving, and above all, submission to God's will.

Prayer must be alive. This is evident from a study of prayer and religious experience. Prayer must be intimately connected with action and Christian experience.

In matters of feeling and experience, one must have "been there" one's self in order to understand them. An American can not understand a Briton's loyalty to his king, nor can a Briton understand the American's peace of heart in having no king. And who can understand music but the musician? If these are mysteries, how much more are the subtler religious sentiments, and particularly those which are included in that communion with God which we call prayer. Therefore we conclude that it is the man who long has prayed who understands prayer. To stand outside of it, to make an objective and scientific study of it, is valid

and valuable, but only in a supplementary sense; in itself such objectivity is partial and flat, like a photograph compared with life. One must be a participant, for it is the praying man who knows prayer.[1]

It makes no difference what explanation scientists choose to give to the Christian experience of prayer. Faith is the existential category; and faith can not be discerned or explained in terms of psychological analysis. For faith does not rest upon experience--it is strictly God's gift by which man is enabled to hear God's Word. This is a mystery, because God is God and because faith concerns itself with "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."[2]

Prayer must be God-centered. This is evident from an investigation of the psychology of prayer. Prayer depends on a Christian psychology of prayer which takes into account the I-Thou relationship that exists between a personal, yet transcendent God, and man the creature. Prayer is the living relation of a man to God, a refuge, a personal and inner contact, a mutual exchange, a dialogue, an intercourse, a fellowship, a meeting between an I and a Thou.[3]

The implications of creaturehood are seen in that fact that man's knowledge has reached an impasse, for all his boasting of wit and skill and prowess. Famine has overtaken him as it overtook the prodigal son

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[1]Cf. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: The Modern Library, c.1902), p. 318 f.; and George A. Buttrick, Prayer (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1942), pp. 27, 131.

[2]Heb. 11:1. Cf. Sv. Norborg, The Varieties of Christian Experience (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, c.1937), p. 245.

[3]Cf. Friedrich Heiler, Das Gebet: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche und Religionspsychologische Untersuchung (4te Auflage; Muenchen: Verlag von Ernst Reinhardt, 1921), p. 490.

when he tried to play his own providence; and like the fly on the chariot wheel, he cries, "See how fast I make it go!"[4]

But in prayer, a lost art in a lost generation--prayer that is intelligently grounded, alive, and God-centered--man can draw power from God the Creator through Christ the Redeemer.

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[4]Cf. Buttrick, op. cit., p. 20.

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