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THE VALIDITY OF CONDITIONAL PRAYER
AND THE PROVIDENCE
OF GOD

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by
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INTRODUCTION

Origen wrote, "If all happens according to the Will of God, and if His desires are fixed, prayer has no meaning."¹ Certainly, believing Christians of all generations have been cognizant of the problem which Origen here so tersely summarizes. On the one hand, orthodox Christianity has always taught that God has established and rules all that exists according to His immutable will. Side by side with this faith in the Providence of God, the Church has also always believed in the validity and efficacy of prayer. And yet, the individual Christian can scarcely evade the thought: if God has so established the universe that whatever happens, happens according to His sovereign will, then prayer is not necessary, inasmuch as God's will is done without man's prayer. Petitions for spiritual gifts are perhaps more immune to the difficulties of this problem, but certainly conditional prayers are all but obviated if the problem is not solved.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the problem stated towards the end of establishing unequivocally the fact that conditional prayer is a valid reality in the realm of God's providence. A solution of the problem is, of course, impossible on any other premises

¹Mario Puglisi, Prayer. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 249.

except those which are faithful to Scripture. It will be noted how the systems of rational philosophy serve only to establish the impossibility of reconciling the fact of God's providence with the fact of conditional prayer. According to such systems, the problem is usually solved by denying either the reality of conditional prayer or the reality of providence.

In view of this, the essayist will seek a solution of the problem in the light of Scripture. His course of investigation will be to first establish the nature and validity of conditional prayer as a true form of prayer, then to define the validity of such prayer in reference to the providence of God, and finally to establish the inter-relationships of the two concepts, always in a Scripturally-orientated manner.

CHAPTER I

THE REALITY OF CONDITIONAL PRAYER

A. The Proper Nature of Conditional Prayer

Christian prayer is commonly and correctly described as the conversation of the believing heart with God.¹ In general, Christian prayers are of two types. They may be addressed to God as prayers of thanksgiving or as prayers of supplication. The latter includes all petitionary prayers, to which group conditional prayers belong. It is this form of prayer, therefore, which will be considered in the present study.

An understanding of the true nature of conditional prayer involves the study of its definition, its attributes, and of certain difficulties relating to its proper usage.

In order to establish the definition of conditional prayer, one must first investigate the pertinent Biblical terminology referring to prayer. The word "prayer" itself has many equivalents in the language of the Scriptures. No less than five Greek words in the New Testament and twelve Hebrew words in the Old Testament are translated by the English term, "prayer."² When viewed etymologically, the

¹Ps. 19:14; Ps. 27:8.

²William Edward Biederwolf, How Can God Answer Prayer (Chicago: Winona Publishing Co., 1906), p. 38.

English word may be traced back to a Sanscrit word, praach, which means to ask.³ Thus the etymology of the word offers the important indication that prayer does not consist so much in a communion with another person as it does in a petitioning of that person.⁴

The Biblical terminology referring to prayer more often describes the attributes of prayer as such instead of the definition of conditional prayer itself. Several key-words, however, indicate the basic nature of such prayer. Chief of these in the Old Testament is the verb לָּוּ , which, together with its noun לְוִיָּהּ , is used 147 times.⁵ It is thought to be derived from a root meaning to cut, and its connotation is primarily that of intercession.⁶

It appeals to the sovereign majesty of God as one whose prerogative it is to decide the merits of the case and who has the power to put His will concerning the matter into swift execution.⁷

One notes an excellent example of this term's significance in I Sam. 12:23, where Samuel says, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."⁸

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵H. F. B. Compston, "Prayer," Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, edited by James Hastings (New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), p. 744.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Biederwolf, op. cit., p. 260.

⁸Italics by the essayist.

Four of the Greek words in the New Testament which translators have chosen to translate "prayer" also refer quite definitely to the nature of conditional prayer. The term δέομαι, for example, inherently signifies a petition of need. Cremer states that this word, in the Biblical Greek, means a desire combined with a basic want.⁹ Quite similar to this term in content is the word ἐρωτάω, which again refers to an urgent petitioning. This word, however, implies an attitude different from that of its synonym, αἰτέω. The latter, says Trench, is "the constant word by which is expressed the seeking of the inferior from the superior, of the beggar from him that should give alms."¹⁰ To this Bengel adds that Jesus never uses the second term, αἰτέω, in reference to His own praying.¹¹ The former, according to Kittel, is "ein herzliches, demütiges, oder doch höfliches Bitten."¹² Usually the prayers of Jesus are described by this word, ἐρωτάω. The fourth Greek word referring to the matter under consideration is προσεύχομαι, which was chosen by the translators of the Septuagint to express the meaning of the Hebrew לְבַרְכָּה . In the New

⁹Hermann Cremer, Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek, translated from the German by William Urwick (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1878), p. 173.

¹⁰Cremer, op. cit., p. 71.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Heinrich Greeven, ἐρωτάω, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1935), II, 682.

Testament this word appears at least 120 times, and is used only in reference to true Christian prayer. It is the term used to describe the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, for example.¹³ Speaking of this word, Biederwolf says:

This is something more than resignation; something more than submission. It is saying, "Thy will, O God, be done"; but it is more. It is the devotement of self to God in seeing that His will is done.¹⁴

Thus, as has been indicated from the meanings of the above key-words, the concept of petitionary prayer is clearly described in the Scriptures. But just what then, according to these terms, is conditional prayer? Perhaps the definition of this form of prayer may best be understood if such prayer is contrasted with that form of prayer known as unconditional.

Whenever believers pray for temporal blessings, they pray conditionally, Mtt. 26:39; but if they pray for spiritual blessings, they pray unconditionally, since God has promised to grant them His grace, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation under all circumstances, 2 Cor. 12:9.¹⁵

Conditional prayer, therefore, is a form of petitionary prayer, but is distinguished from the usual petitionary prayer in that it seeks temporal, and not spiritual, benefits from God. And in addition, conditional prayer must

¹³Luke 22:44.

¹⁴Biederwolf, op. cit., p. 272.

¹⁵J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), p. 433.

always be uttered in reference to God's will and must also always recognize that its validity and efficacy is subject to God's will. The ends such prayers seek are not to be regarded as exclusively material; rather, the term "temporal blessings" refers to the entire range of blessings necessary to the earthly well-being of present time-space entities in contradistinction to those blessings essentially related only to the spiritual realities of the Kingdom of God. Thus a prayer which seeks a blessing in the realm of man's psychic nature may certainly be conditional, for a psychic blessing need not be tantamount to a spiritual blessing.

As has already been implied, conditional prayer, properly speaking, is the privilege and prerogative only of the true believer. Only the regenerated one can know the true God who alone hears and answers prayer. Only the regenerated ones have been placed in such a relationship with God that they may make their supplications known unto Him.¹⁶ The Scriptures not only teach this fact, but also its corollary: the prayers of non-believers are not valid prayers, and therefore pagans cannot be assured of an answer to prayer, earnest and sincere though their utterances may be.¹⁷

¹⁶J. M. Reu and P. H. Buehring, Christian Ethics (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), p. 178.

¹⁷Cf. 1 Sam. 28:6; I Kings 18:26; Prov. 1:24-29.

Nevertheless, even Christians misapply conditional prayer, a fact so tersely phrased by James, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."¹⁸ It is necessary, therefore, to inquire more deeply into the nature of the prayer for temporal blessings, this time to discover its proper conditions.

Properly speaking, one ought not to speak of "the conditions" of true prayer, for only one condition is demanded by God. "The only condition He makes," says Dr. Arndt, "... is that the prayer be offered in true faith."¹⁹ Friedrich Heiler expresses the same fact in somewhat more philosophical terms: "Alles naive Beten hat zur Voraussetzung den Glauben an die reale Existenz und den anthropomorphen Habitus des angeredet Gottes."²⁰ Such a view, that faith constitutes the essential condition of true prayer, is certainly corroborated and substantiated by the testimony of the Bible. Christ speaks quite plainly in Mark 11:24, "Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye have received them and ye shall have them."

¹⁸James 4:3.

¹⁹W. Arndt, Christian Prayer (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1937), p. 50.

²⁰F. Heiler, Das Gebet (Munchen: Verlag von Ernst Reinhardt, 1921), p. 210.

So also Paul: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God... But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."²¹

One however cannot abruptly close an investigation of the manner in which true conditional prayer is to be addressed to God by simply saying that faith is necessary, for such faith has many facets, which, when individually considered, will help to determine the rich ramifications of this essential condition.

Virtually synonymous with the condition of faith is the condition that prayers are to be expressed in the name of Jesus. Christ himself established this prerequisite when He said, "Whatsoever ye ask in my name, that will I do."²² To analyze the meaning and significance of "praying in the name of Jesus" is to probe into the innermost citadel of faith. Some suggest this means merely to follow the example of Jesus' prayer life when one prays. Meaningful though such a view may be, it states but half the truth of "praying in the name of Jesus." It is not an act so much as an attitude which is described by this term. One must be in personal union with Christ through faith before the prayer in Jesus' name can even become a reality. It was Augustine who explained this so simply when he wrote, "We pray to Him,

²¹1 Tim. 2:8.

²²John 14:13.

through Him, in Him."²³ Bishop Gore also captured the same truth. He said, "Prayer in the name of Christ is something which can only arise out of a will and heart redeemed by Christ, and brought by Him into union with God."²⁴ But perhaps the clearest explanation of the meaning of "praying in the name of Jesus" is the one given by Dr. Arndt:

Coming before God, we should have the name of Jesus upon us and exhibit it as it were. The Savior tells us that we should appear before God as His disciples, His followers. "In His name" is here equivalent to "with His name." It means that we plead the merits of Christ as we voice our supplications, pointing to His atonement as the basis of our assurance that we shall be heard.²⁵

Very evidently then, the phrase "in the name of Jesus" is not a magical touchstone to be thrown into a prayer as a haphazard afterthought. The prayer in the name of Jesus is one of moral correspondence with the mind and will of Christ, and of full assurance that because of His merits such prayer is acceptable and will be heard. From such trusting confidence, says Luther, this prayer "receives its value and dignity so as to be acceptable to God and its force and dignity that it must be heard."²⁶

²³H. Martensen, Christian Ethics, First Division: Individual Ethics, translated from the German by William Afflect (Fourth Edition; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.), p. 173.

²⁴C. Gore, Prayer and the Lord's Prayer, (New York: Edwin S. Gorham, 1898), p. 21.

²⁵Arndt, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁶Ibid., p. 17.

Closely allied to the two conditions of prayer already discussed, and in fact implicit in them, is the third: true prayer is to be prayed according to the will of God. There are some who believe that the principal law of all prayer is to pray, "Not my will, but thine be done."

Christian prayer is essentially an active identification of the human will with the divine will; and that confidence which is its distinctive privilege consists in two things - first, the persuasion that our will is in harmony with God's; and second, the certainty that God's will shall be done.²⁷

To be sure, the importance of this aspect of praying is clearly stressed in Scripture: "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us."²⁸

Two facts are immediately derived from the above passage. The first is that conditional prayers are valid only when they are in harmony with the will of God; and the second, a corollary of the first, is that conditional prayers are valid only when the petitioner's will is limited to and by the Divine Will. The Christian who prays conditionally does not expect his human will to prevail, but rather expects God's will to be done. Nor does true conditional prayer desire those things which the petitioner knows to be inimicable or even opposed to God's economy.

²⁷R. H. Coats, The Realm of Prayer (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), pp. 89-90.

²⁸1 John 5:14.

To pray for such ends would be, in the words of Luther, "eine Gottesversuchung, dem keine Verheisung gegeben ist."²⁹ As is of course obvious, praying according to the will of God is again possible only for those who are in faith and who pray in the name of Jesus. Yet the believing petitioner dare never assume that his prayers for temporal matters will always be consistent with the purposes of God. The very fact that his nature is simul justus et peccator is proof positive of this fact. No Christian can ever lay claim to so high a degree of moral correspondence with Christ that he could with pristine clarity be certain of every aspect of God's will in temporal matters; hence the pertinency and necessity of praying conditionally. One is here reminded of John Gerhard's advice to the one who prays:

Let him pray wisely, by which I mean, let him pray for those things which minister to the divine glory and the salvation of his neighbours. God is all powerful, therefore do not in your prayers describe how He shall act; He is all wise - therefore do not determine when ... Those things which He promises conditionally - for example, temporal things - those on the same principle pray for conditionally. Those things which He does not promise at all, those also you will not pray for at all. God often grants in His anger what His goodness would deny. Therefore, follow Christ, who fully conforms His will to the will of God.³⁰

There is still another characteristic of the conditional prayer which is uttered in true faith. One might, for want

²⁹D. Vorwerk, Gebet und Gebetserziehung (Schwerin i. Mecklenburg: Friedrich Hahn, 1913), p. 210.

³⁰Gore, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

of a better phrase, call this fourth characteristic of true prayer "the importunity of desire." Two of Christ's parables are directed towards the emphasizing of this principle. The first is the account of the Midnight Appeal,³¹ where it is quite pointedly asserted that the one who hears the midnight cry of his friend arises because of the friend's importunous petitioning. The second parable³² tells of the importunate widow whose persistency moved even an unjust judge to action. Both parables indicate that if human beings (and unjust ones at that) hear importunous requests, then how much more will a just and merciful God do so.

The nature of such importunity of desire is picturesquely portrayed by two of the Biblical words used to describe prayer. The first is the Greek ἐκτείνω, which literally connotes "stretched-out," but which in translation is given the meaning of "intentness" or "earnestness."³³ "It is a word representing the soul under the sway of an intense passion; stretched out, with its every energy strained in the exercise to which it is devoted."³⁴ Very significantly, it is this word which is used to describe the prayer of

³¹Luke 11:5-13.

³²Luke 18:1-8.

³³J. H. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Co., 1889), p. 200.

³⁴Biederwolf, op. cit., p. 246.

Jesus in Gethsemane, where, "being in an agony he prayed more earnestly."³⁵ Here, then, is the term which describes the earnestness of an importunous prayer; but importunity also includes persistency, a trait exemplified by the Greek word ὑπωπιάζω . The root of this word bears the descriptive meaning of "one who beats another's face black and blue."³⁶ By extension, the term also means "to give one intolerable annoyance by entreaties."³⁷ The dramatic persistency which this term describes is perhaps best seen from the fact that it was chosen to depict the praying of the midnight petitioner in the parable referred to above.

What then is "importunity of desire" in prayer? It is the earnest persistency of one who prays in faith. It is, as Isaiah so aptly says, the "stirring up of ourself to take hold of God."³⁸ Quite obviously again, such a trait finds possibility and propriety only insofar as it is part and parcel of the prayer in the name of Jesus. In the words of Matthew Henry, "We prevail with men by importunity because He is pleased with it."³⁹

³⁵Italics those of the essayist.

³⁶Thayer, op. cit., p. 646.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Coats, op. cit., p. 80.

³⁹Arndt, op. cit., p. 56.

At this point care must be taken to avoid a misconception which might easily be deduced from the preceding discussion. All too often it is concluded that if a Christian prays conditionally in the proper manner, his prayer is assured of being automatically answered in the way desired. Such a view, however, is far from the truth. Wilhelm Walther very strongly denounces this erroneous conception when he writes:

Die Bibel stellt bestimmte Forderungen an den Beter, um unberechtigter Erhörungserwartung zu wehren und zum Ideal des Gebetes hinzuweisen. Aber es steht nicht so, dasz Gott nun gezwungen wäre, jedes Gebet zu erhören, welches den Anforderungen entspricht...Dann wäre ja das Gebet eine Beschwörungsformel, ein magisches Zaubermittle, durch welches wir Gott zu unserem Werkzeug machen.⁴⁰

Very evidently then, conditional prayers cannot always be assured of the answer desired. But how may one account for this difficulty? St. Augustine attributes the ineffectiveness of prayers to three reasons, taken either separately or collectively: petitis vel mali; vel male, vel mala.⁴¹ The first asserts that some people are unfit to be heard when they pray because they are not agreeable to God; the second, that others are not heard because their prayers lack some of the necessary qualities of a good prayer; the third, that others are not heard because they pray for

⁴⁰Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 620.

⁴¹F. Girardey, A Treatise on Prayer (New Orleans: T. Fitzwilliam & Co., 1835), p. 15.

unsuitable things.⁴² All three of Augustine's assertions draw attention to the basic difficulty confronting the concept of conditional prayer, and that is the radical evil of sin within the petitioner. Sin causes both petitioner and petition to be disagreeable to God. And even though the prayer for temporal things arises from faith and is uttered in accordance with all the attributes of true prayer, still a difficulty remains. The perfect knowledge of God's will which once resided in the imago Dei is not yet the possession of the believing petitioner, inasmuch as he is still simul justus et peccator. This obstacle lies at the very root of the concept of conditional prayer. It is just because no man on earth can or does know absolutely what every aspect of God's will is for temporal things⁴³ that the prayer for such matters must of necessity be expressed with the condition, "nevertheless, Thy will be done."

B. The Validity of Conditional Prayer as a Form of Prayer

That the nature of conditional prayer is firmly established by Scripture has now been proved. Yet the question still remains, is such prayer a valid form of prayer? Is conditional prayer in agreement with the nature of Christian prayer as such? There are those who answer with a strong

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ecc. 6:12.

negative and thus all but obviate conditional prayer on the ground that it is inconsistent with the spirit of true prayer.

In the main, such negation arises primarily from the philosophical investigation of the nature of prayer.⁴⁴ This type of investigation examines prayer with the view of establishing its ultimate valuations. Accordingly, that which appears as being essentially good, true, and beautiful in prayer, is exalted; whatever else fails to satisfy the critique of reason is discarded. The result is a philosophical concept of prayer, a concept "innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft." And within this system, conditional prayer has no place.

The tenets of a rationalistic ethics recognizes nothing essentially good in conditional prayer. There are those who even go so far as to say that no prayer can be ethically justified, and that therefore there should be no praying. At least, this was the idea of Schopenhauer: "Jeder Ritus oder Gebet zeugt unwidersprechlich von Idolatrie" and also Kant: "Bei dem Gebete ist Heuchelei."⁴⁵ (One cannot help but be reminded here of the pithy comment of Matthaïas Claudias: "Ob die Menschen beten dürfen - eine Frage wie die, ob die Menschen eine Nase haben dürfen!")⁴⁶

⁴⁴Heller, op. cit., p. 202.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 210.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Most ethical systems, however, recognize the validity of at least one type of prayer, namely, the prayer of thanksgiving. And why should not this be the best form of prayer? The Christian, as both Schleiermacher and Ritschl say, already has such precious treasures in reconciliation that his only ethical response should be that of praise and thanksgiving.⁴⁷ And since petitionary prayer is obviously not akin to either praise or thanksgiving, it is discarded from usage. Or expressed even more accurately, petitionary prayer (and especially its conditional form) is definitely selfish. Mario Puglisi in his book Prayer broadly hints that all such prayer is eudaemonistic. If this be true, then the criticism of Eduard von Hartmann really destroys the ethical validity of conditional prayer when he says, "Vom Standpunkt eines höheren religiösen Bewusstseins müssen die eudaemonistischen Zwecke des Kultus als irreligiös erscheinen."⁴⁸ Fosdick likewise largely discredits conditional prayer on these grounds by accusing it of valuing God "merely because of the things He may give."⁴⁹

But how do such critics evaluate the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, and especially the petition for temporal benefits? One approach, that of Tolstai and Schleiermacher,

⁴⁷Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 605.

⁴⁸Heiler, op. cit., p. 203.

⁴⁹H. E. Fosdick, The Meaning of Prayer (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1915), p. 24.

seeks to minimize the petitionary aspects of that prayer. Both, for example, understand the fourth petition as a request for spiritual blessings alone, which view they feel would definitely elevate the nature of this petition.⁵⁰ Schleiermacher also discredits the fifth petition. For him, the desire for the strengthening of the consciousness of God, not the forgiveness of sins, is the essence of this petition.⁵¹ These two men thus minimize the petitions but accentuate the elements of praise in the Lord's Prayer.

Another explanation seeking to justify the presence of petitions in the Lord's Prayer is that which would classify these petitions as prayers of thanksgiving. This, at least, was the solution advanced by Ritschl:

Die Bitte um das Brot des Bedarfes ist vielmehr Ausdruck des Dankes an Gott, wenn einerseits vorausgesetzt ist, dasz Gott die Bedürfnisse des Lebens vor der Bitte, um diesselben zu gewahren bereit ist (Matth. 6,8), andererseits, dasz man den Lebensbedarf durch die eigne Arbeit erwirbt.⁵²

For Ritschl, in fact, all petitionary prayer is but "eine Abart des Dankgebetes."⁵³

The following words of Schleiermacher aptly summarize the results of a rationalistic ethical judgment of conditional prayer:

⁵⁰Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 595.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., p. 605.

⁵³Ibid., p. 604.

Diejenigen, welche sich rühmen dass sie anhalten im Gebet und nicht müde werden, Gott zu bitten, sind noch fern von wahrer Gottesfurcht. Es ist ein Zeichen grösserer und aufrichtigerer Frömmigkeit, wenn das Bittgebet selten vorkommt und uns nicht lange beschäftigt... Das wahre Gebet soll uns des Bittens vergessen machen.⁵⁴

The ideal form of such prayer is quite succinctly expressed by Rosseau: "I bless Him for all His gifts, but I do not pray to Him. What have I to ask Him for?"⁵⁵

Conditional prayer is also adjudged as invalid by rationalistic metaphysics. Metaphysics searches for the ultimate and highest truth, and in its investigation of prayer it concludes that the most valid form of prayer is the one which seeks resignation to a deterministic and universal will.⁵⁶ One immediately detects an element of Stoicism in such a concept. Heiler admits this when he writes:

Das Anheimstellen aller Einzelwünsche an Gott leitet zu jener Form des philosophischen Gebets über, die in der Stoa ihre höchste Vollendung erreichte: zur Aussprache der vollen Wunschlosigkeit und Gelassenheit, der restlosen Ergebung in die Hände des Schicksals.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, it is this very view which is embraced by Ritschl; for him, the prime function of prayer is "die

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 592-593.

⁵⁵Coats, op. cit., p. 44.

⁵⁶Heiler, op. cit., p. 206.

⁵⁷Ibid.

Unterordnung unter Gott anzuerkennen."⁵⁸ It was Rosseau again, however, who forced this view to its logical extremity when he evaluated the prayer which seeks the greatest resignation to God's sovereignty as being the most perfect prayer.⁵⁹ The antithesis of the prayer of resignation is the prayer seeking God's intervention. And since conditional prayer, according to the proponents of the concept now under discussion, is the crudest species of that genus of prayer which petitions for God's intervention, it is incapable of being justified as true prayer. There is Fichte, for example, who discredits the prayer seeking intervention because it is, as he believes, the vestige of primeval paganism. "Das System," he writes, "in welchem von einem übermächtigen Wesen Glückseligkeit erwartet wird, ist das System der Abgötterei...und so alt wie das menschliche Verdenben."⁶⁰ Or there is Schleiermacher, who calls such prayer foolish and superstitious.⁶¹ He at least is honest in his logic. His presupposition is that in the relation between creature and Creator there can be no interaction of the creature upon the Creator; only a resignation

⁵⁸Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 604.

⁵⁹Heiler, op. cit., p. 206.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 203.

⁶¹F. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), p. 673.

is possible on the part of the creature. And so Schleiermacher concludes, "a theory of prayer which starts with ideas like those just indicated we can only describe...as a lapse into magic."⁶²

Closely akin to the criticism which would obviate conditional prayer on purely metaphysical grounds is that which attempts to do so on the basis of aesthetical presuppositions. This approach seeks to establish the ideal essence of prayer as that which appeals to the aesthetic taste. And what is such prayer? The prayer which excites admiration or delight by virtue of its nature, rather than by virtue of its uses, is ideal prayer. The practical exemplification of such an ideal may best be seen in the prayer of meditation and sublimation of mysticism.⁶³ A man who prays thus "sits in fellowship with his friend, neither begging for things, ...but gaining the inspiration, vision, peace, and joy which friendship brings through mutual communion."⁶⁴ Or even more lucid is Emerson's definition of such prayer as

...the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul. It is the spirit of God pronouncing his works good.⁶⁵

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Puglisi, op. cit., p. 209.

⁶⁴Fosdick, op. cit., p. 69.

⁶⁵Puglisi, op. cit., p. 152.

Truly, a beautiful concept of prayer, the aesthete would admit. But on the other hand, he would look with utter disdain at conditional prayer. He feels such prayer is a boorish beggary. It suggests to him the thought of one seeking to "change the will of God and curry favor or win gifts by coaxing."⁶⁶ And what prayer could be more distasteful to the standards of the aesthete than that which seeks to assault the highest Ideal in the manner of conditional prayer?

If the natural conclusions of the above philosophical investigations are accepted, then conditional prayer will of course have been quite incisively emasculated. And if in theory the best prayer is that of praise, resignation, and contemplation, then it also follows that in actuality the best prayer is effective only subjectively. Seneca already intimated this, for he said prayer is merely the comforting of a sick soul (aegrae mentis solatia).⁶⁷ In modern times this very same conviction is expressed with more or less refinement. Some today actually conceive of prayer as being nothing more than a noble form of auto-suggestion: "Give up all idea that someone does anything for you when you pray, but remember that you can do a great

⁶⁶Fosdick, op. cit., p. 69.

⁶⁷Heiler, op. cit., p. 203.

deal for yourself."⁶⁸ Of course, it was Schleiermacher who gave such views most impetus amongst moderns. Prayer for him is "the inner combination with the God-consciousness of a wish for full success."⁶⁹ To say that this view plays havoc with conditional prayer is more than an understatement. Even if conditional prayer would still be sanctioned within the framework of Schleiermacher's definition of prayer, all it could achieve would be to free the petitioner "von den eigenen Angelegenheiten ab auf die gemeinsamen Interessen und Güter."⁷⁰ Or, if others pray conditionally for us, "Es stärkt uns, wenn wir wissen, dasz andere teilnahmsvoll für uns beten. Und wir möchten ihre guten Wünsche für uns nicht enttäuschen."⁷¹ The following explanation of the well-known conditional prayers of the ship-wrecked Rickenbacher party also assigns such prayers to the realm of subjective efficacy:

How did God answer those prayers? By thrusting into the minds of those men new ideas, or resurrecting within their minds old ones... By bringing those ideas into the focus of attention, God released the reserves of power hidden within those men's lives.⁷²

⁶⁸Fosdick, op. cit., p. 30.

⁶⁹Schleiermacher, op. cit., p. 669.

⁷⁰Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 597.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²J. G. Gilkey, God Will Help You (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1945), pp. 67-68.

Thus far the claims of philosophical investigation. But are the conclusions of such investigation really valid? There is much which can be said even from a merely philosophical basis by way of refutation. In the first place, the positing of conditional prayer as an invalid form of prayer is a petitio principii. And secondly, there is no warrant for assuming that a dilemma exists between conditional prayer and the prayer of thanksgiving, integration, or communion, and that the dilemma can be resolved only by retaining the one type of prayer which is amenable to philosophy and by eliminating the type of prayer antagonistic to philosophical valuations. On the basis of reason one could just as readily assert that a "both...and," and not an "either...or," relationship exists between conditional prayer and other prayer. Even Nathan Söderblom admits there are two types of prayer: The mystic, which withdraws to meditate on God, and the prophetic, which is a sincere expression of need for help.⁷³ And Luther, in a more orthodox manner, says, "There are two ways of dealing with God, namely, by thanksgiving and petition."⁷⁴

Still another argument from reason may be advanced to refute the views which object to the validity of conditional prayer. The prayer which philosophy prefers in place of

⁷³Puglisi, op. cit., p. 152.

⁷⁴Martin Luther, Sämmtliche Schrifte, edited by J. G. Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1885), X, 2204.

conditional prayer is not valid prayer. It is so defined that its real content is lost; and therefore the prayer of philosophy is merely religious consciousness.⁷⁵ Certainly, even the poorest conditional prayer is more valid than that! But vastly more important in establishing the validity of conditional prayer are the arguments from Scripture.

Scripture, as has already been noted, clearly describes the nature of conditional prayer. It however does not cease there with its discussion of this form of prayer. The Bible also records both the command and usage of such prayer, and thus establishes conditional prayer as a valid form of prayer.

That the Scriptures command believers to pray is well known. It is of course true that the Old Testament seldom mentions a command to pray, but certainly it does record the fact of prayer.⁷⁶ The New Testament, however, often commands prayer in unequivocal terms.⁷⁷ But are prayers for temporal goods, namely conditional prayers, also commanded?

The petition of the Lord's Prayer for "daily bread" is often advanced as proof that Christians are also to pray for temporal benefits. And indeed, this seems quite impressive especially when it is remembered how Christ

⁷⁵Puglisi, op. cit.

⁷⁶Reu-Buehring, op. cit., p. 176.

⁷⁷Cf. Rom. 12:12, I Thess. 5:16, etc.

prefaced the Lord's Prayer with the injunction, "After this manner, therefore pray ye."⁷⁸ It will be remembered from the previous pages that some would make of this petition a mere prayer for spiritual "daily bread." Such a view, however, is hardly warranted by the intention of Jesus. Nevertheless, many refuse to place the fourth petition in the category of conditional prayer, since they feel this petition asks only for those basic necessities which are supplied unconditionally.

Is then conditional prayer actually commanded by Scripture? It very evidently is, according to the statement of Matthew 24:20, "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day." The very "pray" is here definitely imperative in the original Greek and the object of the prayer is definitely in the realm of temporal matters granted conditionally. And when one notes that Christ himself expressed this command, then one may with certainty conclude that the Scripture does specifically command conditional prayer.

The argument of Scripture for the validity of conditional prayer is strengthened also by the fact that it records many instances in which conditional prayer was used. The Old Testament, for example, records stirring and dramatic instances of this type. There is Abraham

⁷⁸Matt. 6:9.

interceding for Sodom;⁷⁹ Moses pleading for the preservation of the Israelites at the Red Sea;⁸⁰ Samuel praying for victory over the Philistines.⁸¹ Such a list could, of course, be much extended, but that is hardly necessary, since these three examples clearly portray the usage of conditional prayer in pre-messianic times - and even more, these three examples also give proof of the efficacy of such prayer. The New Testament likewise records many applications of the privilege and efficacy of conditional prayer. One notes there the Syrophenician woman beseeching the Savior for her daughter's cure;⁸² the early Christians in Jerusalem praying for the release of Peter from prison;⁸³ Paul and Silas petitioning God in the prison at Philippi.⁸⁴

But the most noteworthy description of the use of conditional prayer which the Scriptures record is that of Christ's prayer in Gethsemane. All the Synoptics agree quite definitely in showing how the Savior there uttered his prayer subject to the will of the Father.⁸⁵ The very

⁷⁹Gen. 18:32.

⁸⁰Exodus 14:15.

⁸¹1 Sam. 7:5-11.

⁸²Mrk. 7:25-30.

⁸³Acts 12:5.

⁸⁴Acts 16:25.

⁸⁵Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42.

words, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done," obviously establish this prayer as being conditional. To be sure, the context of this prayer might easily be so understood as to prove the inefficacy of conditional prayer. Since many believe Christ's prayer in Gethsemane was not answered, it might be concluded that conditional prayer, after all, has no validity before God. The author of Hebrews, however, refutes this mistaken supposition when he says Christ's prayer in Gethsemane "was heard in that He feared."⁸⁶ Wilhelm Walther offers the following commentary on this passage:

Heb. 5:7 wird von dem Gethsemanegebet gesagt, dass es erhört worden ist. Die Erhörung bestand in Befreiung von der Angst, in der Stärkung von oben zum letzten Leidenkampf (Lk. 22, 43). Freilich war die Erhörung anders, als Jesus sie gedacht hatte. Als Mittel, damit er vom Todesgrauen befreit würde, hatte er Gott das Vorübergehen des Leidenskelches vorgeschlagen. Gott erfüllte ihm seinen Wunsch und befreite ihn von der Angst, wendete aber ein anderes Mittel dazu an, indem er ihm die Kraft zum Ertragen des Schwersten stärkte.⁸⁷

Certainly then, the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane stands out not only as the most decisive example of conditional prayer recorded in the Scriptures but also as the example par excellent of an effective conditional prayer. More will be said about the implications of this prayer in subsequent sections.

⁸⁶Heb. 5:7.

⁸⁷Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 616.

A summarization of the investigation thus far must only reiterate the fact that Scripture definitely establishes the nature of conditional prayer as a valid form of prayer. Scripture validifies such prayer by defining its concept and also by describing its usage. But this only leads to the more basic question already implied: does not the fact of God's providence obviate the validity of conditional prayer as an efficacious reality? Kant, in effect, answers affirmatively:

Es ist ein ungereimter und zugleich vermessener Wahn, durch die pochende Zudringlichkeit des Bittens zu versuchen, ob Gott nicht von dem Plan seiner Weisheit zum gegenwärtigen Vorteil für uns abgebracht werden könnte.⁸⁸

Luther, on the other hand, would answer with a strong negation:

Niemand glaubt, wie kräftig und stark das Gebet sei und wie viel es vermag denn der, den es die Erfahrung gelehrt, und der's versucht hat.⁸⁹

Whose view then is correct, Kant's or Luther's?

⁸⁸Heiler, op. cit., pp. 203-204.

⁸⁹Vorwerk, op. cit., p. v.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF PROVIDENCE AS RELATED TO CONDITIONAL PRAYER

A. The Acts of God Especially Related to Providence.

An understanding of providentia is impossible unless those acts of God which are especially related to it are first examined. Dogmaticians agree that providentia depends upon God's foreknowledge (praescientia), decree (decretum), and execution (executio); but they disagree as to the meanings and mutual relationships of these divine acts.

The crux of the conflict of course hinges upon the meaning of praescientia. There is unanimity in believing that foreknowledge is a form of God's omniscience. One could even accurately say the two are identical; for since there is neither prior nor posterior with the omnipresent, eternal God, His prescience sub specie aeternitatis actually embraces the all as though the all were presently immanent. In this sense, therefore, omniscience and prescience are identical. Usually, however, praescientia is regarded as a specific form of omniscience, consisting in that act of God whereby He knows all that will exist in created reality.

But now the question arises, is such knowledge merely an intellectual act or does it also include causality? Some firmly maintain that the absolute foreknowledge of God has

no causal effect whatsoever. "Dies und nicht weiter - nämlich das neutrale Allwissen Gottes - liegt im Begriff der Allwissenheit," says Rothe.¹ In direct contradistinction is the view of St. Augustine: "Not because they are, does God know all creatures spiritual and temporal, but because He knows them, therefore they are."² And Aquinas speaks even more forcefully:

The knowledge of God is the cause of things. For the knowledge of God is to all creatures what the knowledge of the artificer is to things made by his art... Now it is manifest that God causes things by His intellect, since His being is His act of understanding.³

From Rothe's view one could logically deduce a casualistic world view; from that of Aquinas and Augustine one could easily come to a deterministic view.

The Bible, of course, ascribes both passive and active aspects to God's knowledge. It describes divine knowledge as a quality within the Godhead which embraces all; but it also speaks of God's knowledge "as an ability and skill to carry out His purposes."⁴ There very clearly is a mystery here which human reason dare not and cannot try to fathom. Just how the purely intellectual aspect of God's fore-knowledge is related to causality is a question not answered

¹Brunner, Emil, Die Christliche Lehre von Gott (Zurich: Zwingli-Verlag, c. 1946), p. 230.

²Aquinas, Thomas, Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, edited by A. C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), I, 147.

³Ibid.

⁴R. Caemmerer, "The Nature and Attributes of God," The Abiding Word, edited by Theo. Laetsch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948), II, 67.

in Scripture. An attempt at a logical resolution of these two seemingly contradictory aspects of praescientia would end either in the Scylla which believes all reality is predetermined, or in the Charybdis which believes all created beings are absolutely free.

Nevertheless, God's foreknowledge can obviously never be frustrated by created reality.

All existences and events will be as God has from eternity foreknown them; therefore the opposite to what is, and the different from it, cannot be; the power to the contrary does not exist. The inference is not merely the non-existence of a power to the contrary, but its impossibility.⁵

The basic fact therefore remains that God knows all - all which actually exists (scientia necessaria), all which possibly can exist (scientia libera), and all which conditionally might exist (scientia media). And furthermore, just as God is never separated from reality, so also His foreknowledge can never be regarded as being independent of His purposes and designs for created reality.⁶

God does more than know all things that must, can, and may happen in the light of His divine purpose for the created world. He has also decreed to fulfill His foreknown purposes in, with, and through His providence of the world.

⁵Theo Graebner, "Predestination and Human Responsibility," Concordia Theological Monthly, V (March, 1934), 164.

⁶Caemmerer, op. cit., p. 67.

"He is impelled by desires and plans to carry out the results of His insight into men and mankind."⁷ This then is the decretum of providence:⁸ the activity of God whereby He has willed to efficaciously uphold, concur with, and govern all created beings toward the manifestation of His own glory and the welfare of the universe.

The decretum of providence may well be best understood by relating it to the wisdom of God. To say that God issued this decree in wisdom is to say that "He disposes and ordains all things in a most admirable manner for the attainment of His end, Job 12,13; 28,20; Rom. 11,33."⁹ Here again one must carefully avoid any distorted logical deductions. It would be easy to press the decretum of providence to such an extent that human responsibility would be denied. Hodge, for example, teaches that God, in His decree, "according to the counsel of his will,...for his own glory,...hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass."¹⁰ However, one dare not refute Hodge's view by saying that God's decrees are entirely violable and therefore capable of being conditioned by human liberty, for this would also be anti-Scriptural.

⁷Ibid.

⁸J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), p. 189.

⁹Mueller, op. cit., p. 170.

¹⁰Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), I, 535.

Very clearly, here again is a mystery. Scripture teaches that God's decrees are efficacious and inviolable; but it also teaches that man is a volitional being, and as such is capable of free choice (at least in the area restricted to civil righteousness) without coercion. Lutheranism seeks to give expression of both these facts by teaching, on the one hand, the necessitas immutabilitatis with reference to God's decrees, and, on the other hand, the contingentia rerum with reference to human responsibility.¹¹ And more specifically, it understands the decree of providence as an opus ad extra of God wherein He recognizes and works through the intermediate causes which He has implanted in the world.¹² God's decretum in the realm of providence thus never violates the integrity of volitional beings. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the decree of providence is always in the context of God's holy love. What He decrees for the world never denies His inherent holiness; nor does it ever deny His inherent goodness. His decree of providence is therefore both just and good.

Implicit in praescientia and decretum is the executio of God as regards providence. Executio refers to the actual application of that which God has ordained in His wisdom for the attainment of His purpose in the world.

¹¹Mueller, op. cit., p. 163.

¹²Ibid., p. 176.

That which God knows is executed in time-space, not as a caused result of, but in correlation with His praescientia; and that which He decrees, He also executes explicitly.

Werner Elert, writing in explanation of executio, says:

...das besagt nur, dasz Gott, "was er sich vorgenommen und was er haben will," auch durchföhrt, nicht aber, dasz der Willensvorsatz aus dieser oder jener von uns nachzukonstruierender "Eigenschaft" Gottes zwangsläufig hervorgehen muszte.¹³

Nevertheless, the omnipotence of God is certainly allied with the concept of executio. God executes His purposes for the world in the fullness of His power. Does this mean He effects absolutely all that does or can happen? This would of course be possible with God. But "wird nämlich die Allmacht Gottes als potestas absoluta verstanden, so verschlingt dieser Gedanke alle creatürliche Selbständigkeit."¹⁴ One may accordingly rather speak of God's ordinata potestas as being operative in His execution of providence. This distinction conceives of God as taking into consideration the causes which He established in the world.¹⁵ The fact that God has chosen to execute His power in recognition of the volitional integrity of created beings is thus safeguarded. Brunner says:

¹³Werner Elert, Der Christliche Glaube (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1940) p. 285.

¹⁴Brunner, op. cit., p. 266.

¹⁵H. Schmid, Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1889) pp. 128-129.

✓ Bott ist nicht an sich der Allmächtige - eine solche Aussage ist für Biblisches Denken überhaupt sinnlos, da das Machthaben Gottes - im Unterschied zum abstrakten Können - immer ein Machthaben über etwas ist.¹⁶

And this leads to the very threshold of the concept of providence itself, for the God who established all created reality still upholds and directs it according to His unbounded wisdom, power, and goodness.

B. The Meaning of Providence.

Although the doctrine of providence is clearly taught in the Scriptures, the word itself occurs there but rarely. The Hebrew language, in fact, had no term corresponding to the English word, providence,¹⁷ but the Old Testament nevertheless abounds with dramatic portrayals of God's gracious but just care of His world. The Greeks had a word for providence, pronoia, which signifies forethought, either human or divine. Both Xenophen and Plutarch made much use of this very term to describe the watchful care of the gods over their wards.¹⁸ The Apocrypha show two instances where pronoia is used, both of these being in Wisdom. There, in chapter fourteen, verse three, one reads

¹⁶Brunner, op. cit., p. 267.

¹⁷W. Davison, "Providence," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, edited by James Hastings, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928) IX, 415.

¹⁸Ibid.

of God's providence guiding a vessel through waves; and in chapter seventeen, verse two, the reference speaks of lawless men who are "exiled from the eternal providence." The New Testament also uses the word pronoia twice, once in Acts 24:2 and again in Romans 13:14. In both cases the word is used to describe human prevision. Beyond these two places the word is absent from the New Testament, but again, as in the case of the Old Testament, the doctrine of the divine ordering of the world is everywhere apparent in the New Testament. One may then conclude with certainty that the Scriptures from beginning to end testify of God's activity in the world and for the world since His creation of the world. As Oettingen so forcefully says:

Die ganze h. Schrift - ja, ich möchte sagen nicht bloß ihr Inhalt, sondern auch ihr Dasein und Sosein, ihr Zusammenhang und ihr Reichthum bestätigt und besiegelt uns die Gewisheit einer providentiellen und wunderbaren Weltregierung Gottes.¹⁹

C. The Forms of Providence

On the basis of the Scriptural revelation of God's activity in the world, the Church has formulated the doctrine of divine providence. In this the faith of the Church asserts that God continuously cares for His world, that He freely cooperates with the causes He has established in the world, and that He so orders the whole course of the world

^{19A.} von Oettingen, System der Christlichen Heilswahrheit (München: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1900), I, 346.

that His divine purpose for it will be fulfilled. These three assertions have really described the forms of providence: conservatio, concursus, and gubernatio. It must be remembered that these are not three separate or progressive aspects of providentia; rather, they are all mutually interrelated in the immanent activity of God in the world.

1. Preservation (conservatio)

It is clearly apparent from the Bible that the universe could not continue to exist if it were not supported by the wise omnipotence of God.²⁰ Rohnert says, "...die geschaffenen Dinge haben nicht in sich selbst die Kraft ihrer Subsistenz, sondern nur durch Gott."²¹ The reason why created forms and beings still exist, therefore, is not because of any inherent principle of life within them; this rather is due to the economy of God, "soweit er sie ihnen durch die der Schöpfung eingepflanzten Eigenschaften und Mittelursachen verleiht (Ps. 104; 145; 147; Johs. 5,17)."²²

²⁰Ps. 104:29; 145; 147; Col. 1:17.

²¹W. Rohnert, Die Dogmatik der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche (Braunschweig und Leipzig: Verlag von Hellmuth Wollermann, 1902), p. 169.

²²Ibid.

Thus the full definition of conservatio:

...preservation is the act of Divine Providence whereby God sustains all things created by Him, so that they continue in being with the properties implanted in their nature and the powers received in creation.²³

From this one immediately notes that preservation is a continuous activity. Without such continuing action on the part of God, the qualities, properties, and powers which He freely delegated to His world in creation would fall into utter chaos. But through the wisdom and omnipotence of God, all creatures are marvelously preserved. "In other words, the creatures have not only their being in God, but also perform their functions through Him."²⁴

Does preservation, however, include conditional prayer? That it does is evident. In the first place, preservation teaches that every function of man is possible and is sustained only by virtue of the omniscient goodness and omnipotent wisdom of God. Since prayer is the communion of a believing soul with God, it is a spiritual function of man, and thus is performed within the context of God's preservation. And secondly, the Holy Scriptures often ascribe the preservation of the world especially to the Lord Jesus Christ,²⁵ through whose name conditional prayer is uttered. This means that the Lord who commands such

²³Schmid, op. cit., p. 170.

²⁴Mueller, op. cit., p. 190.

²⁵Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17.

prayer is also the One who, through His providence, makes such prayer possible and hears it. It is therefore apparent that God has so arranged His conservation of the world that it includes and recognizes the valid conditional prayers of man.

There are, however, two distortions of the biblical doctrine of conservatio which are quite inimicable to conditional prayer. The first is that of deism, and the second, pantheism.

Deism gives full scope neither to God's preservation of the world nor to conditional prayer in the world.

According to the Deists, God

...made the world and impressed upon it certain laws; endowing matter with its properties, and rational beings with the powers of free agency, and having done this, he leaves the world to the guidance of these general laws.²⁶

The God of the Deists is thus a god in absentia. He has virtually no relationship to the world He created, for, being absent from time-space, He dwells in the supernatural realm. The lower, fixed order of the universe is then left by itself to work mechanically and uniformly according to its own laws.²⁷ Occasionally, however, the God of the higher, freer order comes as a deus ex machina, or better

²⁶Hodge, op. cit., p. 591.

²⁷R. H. Coats, The Realm of Prayer (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), p. 43.

still, as a divine master mechanic, to miraculously set in order whatever demands attention. Some even deny such a very restricted invasion of God into the natural order, as for example the Arminians, who insisted upon a "Nichtzerstören" of the world by God.²⁸ Still other Deists distinguish between the God of nature and the God of grace, thereby implying that the God who hears prayers is not the God who controls the mechanism of nature.

How then can conditional prayer fit into the system of deism? Prayer is possible only where there is fellowship with God. Deism "...makes impossible that fellowship with the divine and that gracious assistance in time of need for which our souls yearn and to which the experience of multitudes gives testimony."²⁹ And even at best, deism would still deny the efficacy of conditional prayer. One could perhaps pray to the deistic God of grace for spiritual gifts; but since He is not the god of nature and therefore could not answer prayers for temporal gifts, conditional prayers would be valueless. Or again, if the world is no more than a gigantic clock running inexorably according to its own laws, there would be no need to pray conditionally. Conditional prayer seeks interference from God - an impossibility in a mechanistic world.

²⁸Rohnert, op. cit., p. 169.

²⁹J. H. Wishart, The Fact of Prayer (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1927), p. 51.

Deism sees God as being totally transcendent, and the world as being totally independent. Pantheism, on the other hand, makes God so immanent that He is all but identified with the world.

Der Pantheismus gieszt bekanntlich Gott und Welt in Eins zusammen, sodasz ein Unterschied zwischen Schöpfer und Geschöpf, zwischen Schöpfung und Erhaltung nicht mehr besteht, und die Welterhaltung als forgesetzte Schöpfung erscheint...Alles Endliche soll hier mit blinder Notwendigkeit aus dem Allgott herauswachsen, um dann in diese seine Substanz wieder zurückzukehren.³⁰

Thus a strict monism is the rule of pantheism. God and world are really synonymous. "Ohne Welt kein Gott; und ohne Gott kein Welt."³¹ And since God and world are one, God is actually no more than the sum of all the parts of the world. Activity is then but an emanation from the world-god. As might be expected, the crassest form of pantheism denies the personality of God. God becomes a person only insofar as He comprehends all personalities in the world. This view drives the psychologist Cousin to write: "Take away nature, and the soul, and every sign of God disappears."³²

And what is man, according to the Pantheist? He is but a moment in the life of God, a mode of God's existence. Moreover, since both the acts of God and the laws of nature

³⁰Rohnert, op. cit., p. 169.

³¹Hodge, op. cit., p. 301.

³²Ibid., p. 302.

are synonymously and necessarily fulfilled, it follows that the volitional freedom of man is virtually destroyed. Spinoza drove this thought to its logical conclusion. "There is nothing contingent in the nature of beings," he taught; "all beings on the contrary are determined by the necessity of the divine nature, to exist and to act, after a certain fashion."³³ Here is an absolute determinism of all activity, even of good and evil activity--for "if God is all and all is God, then the evil and the good alike come from Him and do His bidding."³⁴

Conditional prayer obviously cannot exist in a system of pantheistic monism. "A God who is immanent without being transcendent can as little be a hearer and answerer of prayer as a God who is transcendent without immanent."³⁵ Some Pantheists of course do allow for certain types of prayer. For example, they look with favor upon a blissful reverie of self-forgetfulness and mystic contemplation.³⁶ Nevertheless, conditional prayer itself would be impossible first of all because pantheism denies the possibility of man's communion with God. True, pantheism does merge God and man - even to the point of saying that God can rise to

³³Ibid., p. 303.

³⁴Wishart, op. cit., p. 55.

³⁵Coats, op. cit., p. 44.

³⁶Ibid.

self-consciousness only in man. But "if prayer in its true and proper sense of reciprocal communion is to be maintained, emphasis must be laid on the essential distinction between God and man, as well as the possibility of union."³⁷ And secondly, pantheism makes conditional prayer impossible also because it destroys the belief that God is independent from the world and therefore can freely direct the world. Where God is identified with, and imprisoned in, the world, there conditional praying is hopeless. Thirdly, if every activity is absolutely determined, then conditional prayer could hardly be a valid prayer, freely arising from the faith of man.

The God of the pantheists is devoid of wisdom and power, and so cannot preserve the world or hear and answer prayer; the God of the deists is removed from the world and also cannot preserve the world or hear and answer prayer. On the other hand, the God of Scriptures is neither exclusively transcendent nor exclusively immanent. The world He preserves is not entirely independent, nor is it entirely devoid of freedom. Just how the true God works with the world He preserves is the subject of concursum.

2. Cooperation (concursum)

Since God upholds all created beings according to the laws which He has granted them, it might indeed appear as

³⁷Ibid.

though all change and activity in the world were caused by the creatures alone, "und Gott eben keinen weitem Anteil am Fortbestehen der Welt hätte als den, dass er die der Kreatur verleihenen Kräfte und Gesetze fort dauern liese."³⁸ This mistaken conclusion the doctrine of divine concurrence seeks to avoid, by directing attention to God's continual activity with and through the powers He created. The doctrine is perhaps most concisely defined by Schmid:

Concurrence, or the cooperation of God, is the act of Divine Providence whereby God, by a general and immediate influence, proportioned to the need and capacity of every creature, graciously takes part with second causes in their actions and effects.³⁹

The relationship between God and the secondary causes (causae secundae) with which He cooperates is most important to the understanding of concursus. As is evident from the above definition, dogmaticians often differentiate between concursus generalis and concursus simultaneous. The first refers to the activity of God whereby He excites all powers to act according to their nature.⁴⁰ The second describes God as not only moving causes to action, but as also sustaining, guiding, and determining the action together with its effect.⁴¹ It will be more apparent later

³⁸Rohnert, op. cit., p. 170.

³⁹Schmid, op. cit., p. 172.

⁴⁰Hodge, op. cit., p. 599.

⁴¹Ibid.

how this second distinction might easily be thought of as leading to anti-Scriptural conclusions. Nevertheless, the Bible definitely teaches that all creaturely activity is dependent, both in existence and efficacy, upon the omnipotent cooperation of God.⁴² And yet, the cooperating providence of God does not destroy the integrity of second causes. The volitional capacity of man, for example, is not denied by the concept of concursum. Man can will, but he does so only because God cooperates with such willing. "God, by moving voluntary causes, does not deprive their actions of being voluntary, but rather He is the cause of this very cause in them."⁴³ Thus in the act of concurrence both God and the second cause are mutually and inter-relatedly active: God acts, and the second cause acts simultaneously.

However, the operation of the means is not coordinate with that of God, but rather subordinate to it, so that the secondary causes work only so far and so long as God works through them. Ps. 127,1.⁴⁴

Really, here is the most significant fact about the causae secundae. They are all means to an end. God cooperates with them in such a way that through them "He preserves and directs the things which He has made."⁴⁵

⁴²Phil. 2:13; Acts 17:28; Is. 26:12.

⁴³Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Providence (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., n.d.), p. 160.

⁴⁴Mueller, op. cit., p. 190.

⁴⁵Ibid.

At this point it becomes very obvious how God's cooperating providence extends also to conditional prayer. Just as He cooperates with every activity of man, so certainly He also cooperates with the prayers of man. Quenstedt even speaks of a special concurrence in this area, "by which God is present to all believers...doing holy, honorable, and useful things, by supplying the occasion, inciting, moving, aiding, approving," the work of faith.⁴⁶ Conditional prayer may then very appropriately be regarded as a causa secunda. This gives rise to an even more important observation: conditional prayer is actually an instrument in the hands of God. Some state quite frankly that it is a cause through which God works to produce a certain effect.⁴⁷ Dr. Mueller sanctions such a view, for he says Scripture assures believers "that all things occurring in the Kingdom of Power and in the Kingdom of Grace are mediated through Christian Prayer."⁴⁸

The cooperating providence of God therefore certainly includes and takes cognizance of the reality of conditional prayer. It remains now to discover whether His governing providence does likewise.

⁴⁶Schmid, op. cit., p. 185.

⁴⁷Garrigou-Lagrange, op. cit., p. 206.

⁴⁸Mueller, op. cit., p. 432.

3. Governance (Gubernatio)

Implicit in the concept of gubernatio are the ideas of the divine design and control of the universe. Scripture, in fact, not only indicates that God directs the world, but also says He has so designed it, that in, with, and through it, His purposes will be fulfilled. And likewise, when the Bible speaks of God governing the universe, then it really also is saying He disposes and directs the causae secundae in such a manner that His purposes for the world are already being attained. Here again the divine wisdom and power of God's providence are manifested. His wisdom in this connection

...means not only that the ends which God has in view are consistent with His infinite wisdom, and that the means employed are wisely adapted to their respective objects, but also that his control is suited to the nature of the creatures over which it is exercised.⁴⁹

Added to divine wisdom is divine power, which signifies that God's omniscient power "makes certain the accomplishment of His designs, which embrace in their compass everything that occurs."⁵⁰ There are two more attributes of God, however, which are especially relevant to gubernatio. The first is His holiness, which indicates there can be nothing in God's direction and control of the world that is inconsistent with His highest moral excellency; He is not a

⁴⁹Hodge, op. cit., p. 562.

⁵⁰Ibid.

God who toys with His world in a faithless way. And the second is His mercy, which teaches that God controls and directs the world in love and forbearance.

All these views are beautifully summarized by the following definition of gubernatio:

Government is the act of Divine Providence by which God most excellently orders, regulates, and directs the affairs and actions of creatures according to His own wisdom, justice, and goodness, for the glory of His name and the welfare of men.⁵¹

However, does God's governing providence allow for conditional prayer? The above definition would say it does, for it states that gubernatio "orders, regulates, and directs the affairs and actions of creatures." Certainly the prayers of Christians are here included. And in addition, if gubernatio is God's utilization of second causes "for the glory of His name and the welfare of men," then conditional prayers, if properly understood, are tools in the hands of God whereby He accomplishes His purposes.

There are nevertheless several distortions of gubernatio, all of which make conditional prayer an impossibility. The first is determinism with its complex of allied ideas. All three forms of God's providence could, of course, possibly be misunderstood as teaching that God determines all activity and that creatures have no freedom. This erroneous conception however becomes most apparent

⁵¹Schmid, op. cit., p. 175.

in connection with gubernatio, because this doctrine is the epitome of the two preceding forms of providence.

Determinism essentially means that every activity is caused and fixed by God alone. The integrity of second causes is denied by determinism, since it holds that all activity is absolutely dependent upon the one cause, God. There are of course many varieties of determinism. Any theory which teaches that a pre-established harmony exists for temporal events is certainly deterministic in essence. Aquinas,⁵² by way of example, held that "the type of the order of things toward their end" pre-existed in the divine mind. If this were true, then all activity in space-time would be nothing more than the inexorable mechanization of God's pre-established plan. Another variation of determinism is the Cartesian philosophy of the seventeenth century. The whole tendency there was to merge all second causes into the sole first cause. This in turn gave occasion to materialism on the one hand and pantheism on the other.⁵³

Dem Materialismus sind alle Lebensbewegungen, selbst das Denken und Wollen, blosze Kraftwirkungen der Materie und ihrer Atome; alles, was in der Welt geschieht, soll das notwendige Produkt des in Ursachen und Wirkungen sich bewegenden Weltverlaufs sein.⁵⁴

⁵²Garrigou-Lagrange, op. cit., p. 158.

⁵³Hodge, op. cit., p. 593.

⁵⁴Rohnert, op. cit., p. 172.

Materialism obviously denies all personality, human as well as divine. Within the pale of materialism, thought is to the mind as bile is to the liver; and the world is to its immanent determining principle as power is to electricity.

But when materialism is synthesized with pantheism, then the result is truly devastating, as anyone who knows Spinoza's views will agree. It must however be added that even the subtle pantheism of a Schleiermacher is just as devastating in the end result. Speaking of the latter, Vorwerk writes:

Er nimmt, streng deterministisch, einen lücklosen Kausalzusammenhang an, vermöge dessen das menschliche Handeln ebenso wie das Naturgeschehen streng gesetzlich verlaufe in einer notwendigen verknüpfung von Ursache und Wirkung.⁵⁵

How then can there be any valid activity on the part of second causes? Even at best, a theory of determinism denies the integrity of the freedom of volitional second causes. Conditional prayer then clearly has no place in a deterministic world-view; for if all were absolutely predetermined, there would be no need to pray conditionally. Nothing, not even the God to whom conditional prayer is addressed, could hope to effectively deter the unfoldings of determinism. Or again, if all is predetermined, conditional prayer - even if practised - would be but the

⁵⁵Dietrich Vorwerk, Gebet und Gebetserziehung (Schwerin i. Mecklenburg; Friedrich Hahn, 1913), p. 594.

puppet-like expression of a previously determined act.

Another distortion of gubernatio which is hostile to conditional prayer is the view which holds that God in His governing providence is absolutely immutable. Holy Scripture of course does teach that God is unchangeable in His nature and activity.⁵⁶ But theologians, in their attempts to state in philosophical language the unchangeableness of God, have often advanced to extremes. Sometimes they have described God as not only being immutable, but also as being absolutely immobile and quiescent in His nature and activity.⁵⁷ And when one says this, he is ready to agree that God's gubernatio is fixed in an absolutely immoveable way. God would then be virtually imprisoned in His activity. "Man kann das so ausdrücken," Werner Elert writes in this connection, "dasz man von Gott Freiheit des Wollens aussagt."⁵⁸ Even Emil Brunner claims that whoever thinks of God's activity as being immobile, "der hat aufgehört, an den lebendigen Gott der Offenbarung zu denken, der denkt, wiederum, an das unterschiedslose Absolute."⁵⁹

At this point the strictly philosophical expression of God's absolute immutability can easily become analogous

⁵⁶Numbers 23:19; Prov. 19:21; Mal. 3:6.

⁵⁷Hodge, op. cit., p. 391.

⁵⁸Elert, op. cit., p. 285.

⁵⁹Brunner, op. cit., p. 316.

to determinism. For if God's immutability is so absolute that He is imprisoned in His activity, then "time and change are but the moving image of the Absolute."⁶⁰ There is something ominous about such a picture of God and His activity in the world. The "unterschiedslose Absolute" is like a "calm power, a stony image of gray."⁶¹ The world in which such an One acts would have no true freedom; its course would be "unwiderruflich und unwiderstehlich bestimmt"⁶² through a decretum absolutum. And even worse, if the immutable Absolute would be regarded as pantheistic in the Spinozian manner, then but one step more would lead to a rank materialism. Pantheism would then view the principle of absolute immutability in the world as being virtually synonymous with a genuine immutability of natural law. Freedom would now be impossible; only the insurmountable inexorable fatalism of materialism would remain. Whoever holds this view must agree that "alle Ereignisse (sind) im voraus unabänderlich festgestellt, so dass weder Tatkraft noch Lässigkeit auf den Gang der Dinge irgend welchen Einfluss haben."⁶³ Thus the vicious cycle of an

⁶⁰H. N. Wieman and B. E. Meland, American Philosophies of Religion (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1936), p. 100.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 217.

⁶²Rohnert, op. cit., p. 172.

⁶³Horbach-Gieszen, "Gebet und Vorsehung," Lehr und Wehr für's Deutsche Volk, LXIV (n.d.), p. 5.

immutable materialistic determinism is completed.

How all this would obviate conditional prayer was well expressed by Dr. C. F. W. Walther. Dr. Arndt records his view as follows:

People say from eternity it has been decreed what is to happen, and who now can imagine that by his prayer he is able to bring about a change in the divine plan according to which the world is governed? Who dare hope through prayer to make the unchangeable God hesitant and to induce Him to alter His will?⁶⁴

Yet there is no need to discard conditional prayer because it is inconsistent with determinism and absolute immutability, for neither of these views are in agreement with the testimony of the Bible. They both begin with a priori suppositions of God and His governance, and then proceed to reject whatever is disharmonious with such presuppositions. Scripture nowhere says it is inconsistent with the nature of God that He should recognize and rule creatures capable of originating action. Nor does it say He has immutably predetermined all action which occurs, to the exclusion of volition on the part of man. The Bible instead plainly reveals how God's immutability always takes created reality into account. God therefore is not the absolute principle of immobility, so bound to His immutability that He is not free to cooperate. He reveals Himself always as the only free being, who in His unchangeable

⁶⁴W. Arndt, Christian Prayer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1937), p. 35.

freedom graciously upholds, cooperates with, and governs other free beings.

And to go on, it is also evident that both determinism and the principle of absolute immutability are inconsistent with God's moral nature. As has been noted, the theory that all has been immutably determined by God eventually ends by asserting that God caused evil. What could be more contrary to the holiness of God?

There is still an additional distortion of gubernatio, which, if held and believed, would also play havoc with conditional prayer. This is the theory of casualism - a view which is the direct antithesis of determinism.

"Während der Determinismus von der Voraussetzung ausgeht, dass Gott allein in der Welt wirkt...lässt der Kasualismus alles einem planlosen, blinden Zufall unterworfen sein."⁶⁵ Casualism essentially holds that whatever happens is accidental. The god of this view has no plan for directing the world, but rather allows everything to happen by "blinden Zufall." At best, such a god is a "cosmic guiding genius" who accommodates himself to the ceaseless unrelated happenings of time-space.⁶⁶ Thus instead of being unchangeable in His gracious relationships with the world, God is now entire mutable. And being mutable, He is in the

⁶⁵Rohnert, op. cit., p. 172.

⁶⁶Wieman and Meland, op. cit., p. 216.

process of development. He is, in short, an evolutionary and relative being.⁶⁷ At least, this is the view of William Pepperell Montague. He says the guiding principle of the universe is

...a God, or something very like a God, ...not as an omnipotent monarch, a giver of laws and punishments, but as an ascending force, a nisus, a thrust toward concentration, organization and life. This power appears to labor slowly and under difficulties. We can liken it to a yeast, that, through the aeons, pervades the chaos of matter.⁶⁸

One may here note how the world of the casualists is no more than an uncontrolled "chaos of matter." Purpose is virtually unknown in such a chaotic mass of time-space; at best, there is an "ascending force" leading toward more organization. Everything is in flux, however, for the universal principle and the world are reciprocally mutable.

Of course, it is evident that this philosophy also rests on half-truths of Scripture. To be sure, the Bible does speak about God "changing." It frequently ascribes a change of place to Him, and even records instances where He changed His mind.⁶⁹ But it uses such expressions merely in accommodation to the human mode of perception. Gerhard wrote:

⁶⁷Brunner, op. cit., p. 289.

⁶⁸Wieman and Meland, op. cit., pp. 219-220.

⁶⁹Gen. 11:5; Gen. 6:6; Is. 15:11.

The affections which Scripture ascribes to God do not prove any mutability of the divine essence; for those things which are spoken of anthropopathetically must be understood in a sense becoming God.⁷⁰

Is it then a mere metaphor when the Bible speaks of God changing? Aquinas would answer affirmatively. He taught, "These things are said of God in Scripture metaphorically."⁷¹ This explanation, however, does not do full justice to the truth of the matter. If these passages are mere metaphors, then they are hardly accurate descriptions of God. A better explanation is the one offered by Dr. Mueller, who says:

...wherever Scripture pictures God anthropomorphically or anthropopathetically, this is not a mere modus loquendi, but a true description of God, though after our human mode of perceiving.⁷²

Thus where the Scriptures speak of God changing, they accurately express a fact. Yet this is not to say that God is mutable. One must rather say that God used such Scriptural language to give description of His free activity in reality. God is the infinite God, so incomprehensibly so, that what might appear to humans as saying He changes His relationships with the world is but an assertion of His unchangeable freedom in the world.

Der Gott der Bibel ist der ewig unveränderliche...
Wir können das nicht verstehen, ohne uns auf die
Agape Gottes zu besinnen...Seine Liebe stammt nicht

⁷⁰Mueller, op. cit., p. 164.

⁷¹Aquinas, op. cit., p. 70

⁷²Mueller, op. cit., p. 164.

aus einem Vakuum, sondern aus der fülle. So ist auch sein Eingehen auf die Zeit nicht eine Abhängigkeit von der Zeit, sondern Ausdruck seiner souveränen Freiheit.⁷³

Casualism, of course, has no such God; nor does it know of His gracious governing providence of the world. It would then be folly for the casualist to pray. In the first place, he could not even enter into that communion with God which is the ground of prayer, if God is but an "ascending force." And secondly, if all activity is accidental, then it would be impossible to hope for an answer to conditional prayer. How obvious it therefore is, that conditional prayer is possible only for those who believe in God's governing of the world as it is revealed in Scripture.

But to really fully understand the relevancy of providence to conditional prayer, one must also examine two additional considerations: the extent of providence, and finally, the goal of providence.

D. The Extent of Providence

It has already been implied how far God's providence of the world extends. Every infinitesimal moment of time and every cranny of space is the object of providence. Every created being, whether animate or inanimate, moral or amoral, and every activity of these beings, is subject

⁷³Brunner, op. cit., p. 290.

to the conservatio, concursus, and gubernatio of God. One can never be content with the theory which says God governs the universe merely through general laws, for providence teaches that God, in His omnipresent wisdom, reaches down to every detail of existence.

In every moment, and at every point alike, God directly...upholds, governs, and gives unity to all things visible and invisible, and moulds them according to their own nature and the final purpose of His will.⁷⁴

In order to better explain the full extent of God's providence, dogmaticians speak of a providentia universalis, a providentia specialis, and a providentia specialissima. By this they seek to express the Scriptural teaching that God upholds and governs the entire universe,⁷⁵ but more especially man,⁷⁶ and most especially the believers.⁷⁷

Here again two aberrations from Scripture doctrine may be noted - each of which again posits problems for conditional prayer. The first aberration resides in the view that natural law is immutable. Spinoza, for one, subscribed to such a view, as is evident from his words:

In der Natur geschieht nichts, was ihren allgemeinen Gesetzen widerspricht, und nichts, was damit nicht übereinstimmt oder aus ihnen nicht folgt;...es

⁷⁴Coats, op. cit., p. 157.

⁷⁵Math. 6:26; 10:29.

⁷⁶Job 10:8-12; Ps. 139.

⁷⁷Ps. 1; 33:18; 37:25.

gescheht alles nach Gesetzen und Regeln, welche eine ewige Notwendigkeit enthalten, und die Natur befolgt diese Gesetze und Regeln.⁷⁸

In other words, Spinoza believed that the laws of nature operate with an unflinching precision and allow of no suspension of their activity. This view is exceptionally popular and widespread amongst moderns. Of course, if the theory of nature's immutability were carried to its logical conclusion, it would end by denying both God's providence over nature and His ability to answer prayer in the realm of nature. Gregor Holtum well expresses the problem which is here involved when he writes:

Either we must admit that God gives an answer to prayer directly...or we must recognize that the structure of natural laws does not preclude exceptions.⁷⁹

But is natural law actually as immutable as some would believe? Even modern scientific investigation agrees this is not the case. For example, there are many who say outright that nature is mutable. They seek to prove their point by showing how man can neutralize certain forces by utilizing other natural forces to a greater degree; as, for example, the force of gravitation may be overcome by locomotion. And so it is argued that if man can interfere with the immutability of natural law, then certainly God

⁷⁸Heiler, op. cit., pp. 211-212.

⁷⁹Mario Puglisi, Prayer (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 6.

can do so likewise. But this actually gives little help in solving the problem, since

...it leaves God at the mercy of His world: whatever His skill as a Mechanic, He must forever tinker with wires in order to reach men. Nay, it degrades God into a celestial Tinkerer.⁸⁰

Much more creditable is the current trend in science to disavow any rigid theory of causality in natural laws. The events in nature are no longer viewed as being "foretellable links in an iron chain of cause and effect." It is now more popular to look upon such events as though they contained elements of creative surprise. Henri Bergson, for instance, argues that the past in science can be regarded as fixed, but that future events cannot be determined with certainty by natural law.⁸¹ It is thus obvious how the immutability of nature is being denied in the very camp which first advanced such a theory.

The Christian, however, cannot escape the important question which asks, in what relationship does God stand to natural laws? The answer is really threefold. First, He is the creator and preserver of the forces in nature. This means He endowed matter with its inherent laws, upholds these laws, and directs them according to His purposes. Secondly, God is independent of natural laws. He, by

⁸⁰G. A. Buttrick, Prayer (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), p. 84.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 91.

virtue of His infinite freedom and eternal power, is free to change or suspend them. The natural laws cannot bind God to a certain course of action. Dietrich Vorwerk, reflecting the views of Wilhelm Walther, writes:

Die Naturgesetze sind also nicht aufzufassen als eine Fessel, welche Gott die Hände bindet, so dass er nicht anders als auf dem gewöhnlichen naturgesetzlichen Wege wirken könnte.⁸²

It is therefore entirely possible for God to act in nature without using the normal laws of nature. He can and does set aside natural law and introduce a higher law, by acting directly through a miracle. This means He does not always administer His providence through secondary causes; He may also act to the exclusion of means through His providentia extraordinaria. But it does not follow that God capriciously toys with the natural laws, constantly suspending and changing them. One must then carefully note, in the third place, that the ordinary providence of God does not disregard the validity of natural forces. The faithful wisdom of God makes possible the providentia ordinaria, which means that He graciously wills to operate with and through the laws He has delegated to nature.

The laws of nature accordingly pose no difficulty for conditional prayer. The God who upholds and controls the forces of nature can certainly also graciously direct

⁸²Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 615.

those forces so that conditional prayer will be answered. But what if the Christian should pray conditionally for something he knows is contrary to the course of natural law? Very possibly, he may thereby be tempting God and thus be venturing beyond the propriety of faith - all of which is inimicable to valid prayer. On the other hand, however, he may be uttering his prayer in true faith. If so, then by its very nature his conditional prayer would still be submitted subject to the gracious will of God, who does answer prayer also through His providentia extraordinaria. Here Vorwerk quotes the following warning from Schlatter's writings:

Es ist...eine Verirrung, wenn bei jedem Gebet ein Wunder erwartet wird. Freilich weisz der Beter, dass Gott Natur und Wunder zu Verfügung stehen. Aber er erlässt es Gott, ob er ihn zur natürlichen oder wunderbare Weise erhören will, und er preist ihn auch für die natürlichen Gaben...Die Grenze des Gebets liegt in unserem Glauben.⁸³

Besides the view which would deny God's activity in and through natural law, there is a second view which tries to restrict the extent of providence. This is the view which believes God is not active in history. It will be remembered from a previous connection how the Deists were of the opinion that God's activity was separated from the world of men. But what is here most surprising is to discover that the modern dialectical theology also seems

⁸³Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 623.

to deny God's continuing activity in temporal history.

According to this theology, God works only in the "Urgeschichte."⁸⁴ The "Urgeschichte" has no real relationship with the immanent history of the world, for it is that time when God "breaks-through" history to confront man decisively. Werner Elert says:

Urgeschichte soll...die Gottesoffenbarung als solche sein, worunter des jeweils heute und hier erfolgende unmittelbare Angeredetwerden des Menschen durch Gottes Wort verstanden wird...Diese "Urgeschichte" soll vielmehr ein unzeitliches, zeitloses Ereignis sein.⁸⁵

The actual temporal history is therefore theologically irrelevant. This means the events of men and of nations are for the most part unilaterally independent of God's interference. When God does interfere, He does so only periodically, but He does not continually govern history in all its phases. Historical facts at best are then nothing more than parables and demonstrations of the divine.⁸⁶

The doctrine of "Urgeschichte" is of course quite irreconcilable with the existential thinking which dialectical theology finds so fascinating. But even more significant, this view limits God's providential activity

⁸⁴Elert, op. cit., p. 329.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 330.

⁸⁶J. T. Neve and O. W. Heick, "History of Protestant Theology," A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946), II, 175.

to providentia specialissima alone. The "Urgeschichte" is nothing more than that span of time when God invades the world soteriologically. It is immediately obvious how this would eliminate the possibility of conditional prayer. The only type of petition really consonant with an "Urgeschichte" theory would be an unconditional prayer. For if God is not active at all times in history, then how can one expect an answer to conditional prayer in the temporal realm? Then too, "Urgeschichte" in the last analysis is a refined deism. Thus conditional prayer would here again be obviated on almost the same grounds on which it was made impossible by deism.

The theory of "Urgeschichte" is hardly creditable, however, on the basis of Scripture. This view is really a reflection of German idealism which saw the time-eternity relationship as being mystical and unhistorical.⁸⁷ According to the Bible, however, history is not theologically irrelevant. It definitely is within the realm of God's providential power. Paul, for example, said that God established the appointed times and lands of man's history.⁸⁸ And it may even be said that the Bible depicts history as a secondary means. It is an instrument through which God directs the world; and it is this in a very real

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 178.

⁸⁸Acts 17:26.

sense, for the God who established His law and Gospel in history, still works through history to mediate His goodness and judgment upon man.⁸⁹

Certainly then, there can be no doubt about the fact that God's providence extends over the entire totality of the universe. And if it does, then it most assuredly also takes account of true conditional prayer, wherever and whenever such prayer might be uttered.

E. The Goal of Providence

Implicit in all of the foregoing discussion was the fact that providence is directed towards a certain end, for when one mentions how God upholds His universe and cooperates with it, one inevitably also draws attention to the teleology of providence.

Whatever exists and happens in the world is therefore so directed by God that His purposes will be achieved. Nothing can prevent this - not even the perverted opposition of man.

In spite of sin, which is due to the perversion of human liberty, acting with the concurrence, but contrary to the purpose and intention of God and in spite of evil which is the consequence of sin, He directs all, even evil and sin itself, to the final end for which the universe was created.⁹⁰

⁸⁹Elert, op. cit., p. 331.

⁹⁰L. J. Walker, "Providence," The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), XII, 510.

But what specifically is the goal of providence?

According to Rohnert:

Das Ziel der Vorsehung ist die Ehre Gottes (Spr. 16,4) und das Wohl der Kreatur, vor allem aber die Seligkeit der Frommen (Jes. 45,18ff; Ps. 115,16; Rom. 8,28).⁹¹

God is of course already immanently realizing this purpose through His providentia universalis, specialis, and specialissima. His glory is now being manifested in nature, His material gifts are now being freely given to both good and evil men, and His salvation is now already being perfected in those who are justified. Thus God is certainly already moulding all things according to their own nature and the final purpose of His will.

The Scriptures however reveal that a time will come when the final goal of providence will be perfectly realized. Paul describes this most dramatically as the "summing up of all things in Christ."⁹² This is really synonymous with the final perfection and culmination of Christ's Kingship. Oettingen writes that this means:

...die Herstellung...der Königsherrschaft Gottes innerhalb einer Gottesmenschheit nach dem Gesetz der Liebe... - sei es nun (negativ) durch Gericht über die dauernd Widerstrebenden, sei es (positiv) durch Vollzug seiner erbarmungsreichen Liebesabsicht in Christo.⁹³

⁹¹Rohnert, op. cit., p. 169.

⁹²Ephesians 1:10.

⁹³Oettingen, op. cit., p. 337.

Here then is the final purpose of providence: the perfect revelation of God's power, wisdom, righteousness, and holy love, culminating in the manifestation of the complete Kingdom of Christ, to the eternal glory of God's name and the everlasting salvation of the justified.

All this is again directly relevant to conditional prayer. It is obvious that the end which true conditional prayer actually seeks is the very same end which is perfectly realized in and through providence. For example, when a Christian prays conditionally, he asks that the will of God be finally done. Every valid conditional prayer therefore seeks the welfare of men to the glory of God, which is precisely what God's gracious providence of the world accomplishes in the end result. How true it is then, that "beide, die göttliche vorsehung und die menschliche gebetsbitte, ein und dasselbe Ziel verfolgen."⁹⁴ One could also say that the purpose of conditional prayer is likewise identical with that of providence. Providence seeks to "sum-up" all things under the dominion of Christ; conditional prayer, by virtue of its being in the name of Christ, seeks the same. And finally, conditional prayer may definitely be viewed as one of the actual factors God utilizes to bring about the consummation of His just and gracious purpose for the world.

⁹⁴Horbach-Gieszen, op. cit., p. 8.

The last statement really opens the door for our next consideration. It is obvious from the preceding discussion that providence does not destroy the efficacy of conditional prayer, but that it rather recognizes and makes provision for such prayer. Now, however, it must be shown more definitely in what sense conditional prayer may be regarded as being efficaciously valid.

CHAPTER III

THE VALID EFFICACY OF CONDITIONAL PRAYER

A. The Ground of Conditional Prayer's Efficacy

A Christian who prays conditionally in the name of Jesus is really convinced his prayer is efficacious. For if he accepts the testimony of Christ and His apostles in this matter, then he cannot escape the conviction that his conditional prayers do avail much with God. And in addition, when one agrees that conditional prayer is a valid form of prayer and that God has included it in the realm of providence, then one must certainly also admit that such prayer is efficaciously valid. Extreme caution, however, must be exercised in studying this aspect of conditional prayer, for at this very point the validity of conditional prayer in its relationship to God's providence can be either vindicated or destroyed. As will be noted, it is common to depict the efficacy of conditional prayer in such a way that its valid place in providence is denied. The concept of conditional prayer's validity is therefore actually tested by the manner in which one regards such prayer as being efficacious.

Perhaps the most accurate and fruitful way of understanding the efficacy of conditional prayer is to first discuss the grounds upon which such efficacy rests and then

to define the manner in which such efficacy is utilized. This mode of procedure will also help to avoid distortion, for if the source of prayer's efficacy can be accurately determined, then the manner of prayer's efficacy can also be properly understood.

There are two major views which seek to explain the source of conditional prayer's efficacy. The one claims that the efficacy of prayer, as well as the capacity for praying, is inherent with man. The other view asserts that the source for both the capacity and the efficacy of prayer rests with God alone. It will be noted how these views are mutually exclusive of one another in the last analysis. They may therefore be considered individually.

The first view begins with the observation that the act of praying is a universal human phenomenon. So far as anthropology can determine, men of all times and of virtually all religions have exhibited some form of prayer.¹ From this fact, observers deduce that the capacity for praying must be an innate and fundamental part of the human spirit.² Freud, for example, says the ability to pray rests in the libido.³ This capacity is latent, however,

¹Samuel Zewmer, The Origin of Religion (Nashville, Tenn.: Cokesbury Press, 1935), p. 127.

²Mario Puglisi, Prayer (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 55.

³Ibid.

until aroused by some additional characteristics inherent in the social or personal life of man. According to one view, either the idiogenetic or the heterogenetic aspects of man's social environment are responsible for awakening his capacity for prayer into the very act of praying.

Primitive man is thus believed to have formed an idealized conception of humanity through his associations with fellow men, which then resulted in his praying to an idealization of himself. Feuerbach, who supported this theory, insisted that the idea of prayer is traceable to man's adoration of his projected ideal self.⁴ Voltaire shared the same view.

"Wir richten an Gott nur deshalb Gebete," Heiler quotes him as saying, "weil wir ihn nach unserem Bilde geschaffen haben."⁵ And in more modern times, William James championed this theory. Prayer, he taught, is only an intercourse with an ideal companion.⁶

More popular in the present day, however, is the view which says that prayer is elicited by some trait inherent within the personality of man. One very prevalent theory accordingly places the capacity for praying in man's emotional equipment. Such a view is usually combined with the psychological supposition which holds that the rudi-

⁴Ibid., p. 54.

⁵Friedrich Heiler, Das Gebet (München: Verlag von Ernst Reinhardt, 1921), p. 210.

⁶Puglisi, op. cit., p. 119.

mentary human emotion is fear. In view of these facts, prayer is thought to be occasioned by fear: "prayer is animistic fear - stark fear in early times, and nowadays only refined fear."⁷ Alfred Maury, who is responsible to a large extent for introducing this theory, teaches that fear is the father not only of prayer but of all religious acts.⁸ Closely allied to his view is the one which thinks man's capacity for perceiving the numinous is the source of his praying. Man, it is believed, has an innate predisposition for the divine (whether the divine is an objective deity or a projection of the idealized self is here immaterial), and thus can know the numinous. Because of such inherent knowledge, it becomes possible for man to pray.⁹

There is still another variation of the theory which believes prayer arises from within man's natural equipment. It is also held that the act of prayer has its source in the volitional nature of man. The human will is understood as being free to determine events,¹⁰ and therefore man can will to pray and also to pray effectively. The Hegelian concept of prayer is certainly akin to this view, for Hegel

⁷G. A. Buttrick, Prayer (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), p. 43.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Puglisi, op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁰Charles Gore, Prayer and the Lord's Prayer (New York: Edwin S. Gorham, 1898), p. 26.

taught that prayer is the striving of man's will against God's.¹¹

The last of the above theories shows perhaps most conveniently the usual conclusion of all the views which make man the source of prayer. For if one conceives of prayer as an act caused by some capacity innate with man, then one can easily be convinced that the ground of prayer's efficacy also rests with man. The peculiar ramifications of such a conclusion will be more apparent in a later connection.

Is it true, however, that the efficacy of prayer is grounded in the human spirit? This view is obviously at variance with the teaching of the Bible. Of course, it cannot be denied that even the natural man does possess a capacity for a certain type of prayer. The Scriptures, for example, contain numerous allusions to the ability of pagans to worship, but they always point out that pagan worship is false worship.¹² Thus the prayer of pagans is certainly not valid prayer. And besides, if prayer were merely a specific demand of man's own nature, as it is in the case of pagans, then the relationship of prayer to providence would be distorted. This would be to place providence at the control of sinful man. One must look

¹¹Puglisi, op. cit., p. 50.

¹²Rom. 1:18-32; Acts 17:22-31; 1 Cor. 8.

elsewhere, then to discover the source of prayer and the ground of its efficacy.

True prayer is certainly not born of fear, nor can it be attributed to man's relationship with an idealized humanity.¹³ It originates from the true faith which God alone engenders in man. "Prayer," says Emil Brunner, "is faith in actu. Like faith itself it is a divine gift, and on the basis of this fact it is a divine demand."¹⁴ One must therefore trace the source of prayer not only to faith, but more specifically to God's gracious activity in and for man. For it is God who desires prayer and it is He who makes the efficacy of prayer possible.

The very fact that God demands prayer and promises to answer prayer, proves unequivocally that He desires prayer. If God had not desired the Christian to pray, "He would not bid you pray and add such a severe commandment to it;"¹⁵ nor would He have promised to answer prayer. But even more than desiring prayer, God in addition makes valid prayer possible. Through the blood of His Son and the work of His Spirit, God creates faith in man; and in creating faith, He also creates the capacity for true prayer in man. Thus

¹³Puglisi, op. cit., p. 55.

¹⁴Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 313.

¹⁵Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," Concordia Triglotta, translated from the German by F. Bente (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 703.

valid prayer is very clearly not man's invention. "The first members of humanity who addressed supplications to God, were inspired to do so by God Himself."¹⁶

One must however avoid thinking that prayer is a gift which God has so completely relegated to the believer that he can now do with it as he likes. The Christian does not "own" prayer; he is rather the steward of prayer. After all, it is God who controls the use of true prayer, and not man. Moreover, valid prayer is an impossibility unless it be prompted by God.

God is beforehand with us in all our spiritual desires. The prayer that reaches out...is the prayer that has first of all proceeded from Himself. We pray to Him because He first prays in us. From Him, in the first place, "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed."¹⁷

Yet it is not as though such prayer were automatically and involuntarily pressed from the believer's lips. Rather, as Vorwerk says, "aus dem Glauben an die Versöhnung Gottes durch Christum schöpfen wir den Mut, das priesterliche Vorrecht des betenden Zutritts zu Gott auszuüben."¹⁸ The Christian may and does pray freely - but only insofar as he

¹⁶Garrigou-Lagrange, Providence (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., n.d.), p. 205.

¹⁷R. H. Coats, The Realm of Prayer (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), p. 50.

¹⁸Dietrich Vorwerk, Gebet und Gebetsverziehung (Schwerin i. Mecklenburg: Friedrich Hahn, 1913), p. 603.

is led and prompted by the indwelling Spirit of God, for only then, when the Spirit cooperates with his new nature, can he pray validly.

What (once) was a dictate of his own nature gives place now to the promptings of God's Spirit within him. What then he was led to do out of sheer necessity, he now esteems the sweetest of all his privileges. What then he sought by sacrifice and penance, he now obtains as a gracious bestowal in answer to his petition. What then he undertook with fainting heart, he now pursues with boldness by the "new and living way."¹⁹

Just as God inspires praying in man, so He likewise is the source for all the efficacy of valid prayer. It is plainly evident that if God desires prayer, He certainly also makes provision to answer prayer. His command to pray is eternally paralleled by His promise to answer prayer. In view of these facts, it cannot be held that conditional prayer is efficacious in and of itself. "Der Erhörungsgrund der Gebete liegt nicht in der Beschaffenheit der Gebete. (obwohl dieselbe natürlich in betracht kommt) sondern in Gott."²⁰ One might carry this thought somewhat farther and say that the ground for prayer's efficacy is the gracious activity of God - especially, as regards conditional prayer, His activity in providence. It will be remembered from the preceding chapter how God has arranged His

¹⁹William Edward Biederwolf, How Can God Answer Prayer (Chicago: Winona Publishing Co., 1906), pp. 17-18.

²⁰Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 619.

providence of the world so as to include prayer, and how He uses prayer to help accomplish His purposes in providence. There really can be no talk then about prayer being efficacious in and of itself, for all true prayers have a place in God's plan for the world. "We cannot isolate them and seek to explain their connection with the eternal purpose as if they were outside of it."²¹ God therefore is the only source of prayer's efficacy, not only because He inspires praying but also because He eternally wills to answer prayer. In a very real sense, "the Lord is like a father who has already decided to grant some favor to His children, yet prompts them to ask it of Him."²²

One may then correctly conclude that God, in planning the universe and formulating its laws, has already from all eternity made provision for the answering of valid conditional prayers. Dr. C. F. W. Walther writes:

...since God is omniscient and all-wise, He not only from eternity knew what would be the objectives of our prayer, but from eternity He has so arranged everything and given it its place in the government of the universe that those very things must come to pass which we request of Him.²³

This line of thought is carried even farther by Heiler, who lists the words of Meister Eckhardt:

²¹John Elliott Wishart, The Fact of Prayer (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1927), p. 96.

²²Garrigou-Lagrange, op. cit., p. 209.

²³W. Arndt, Christian Prayer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1937), p. 35.

In seinem ewigen Anblicke sah Gott alle Dinge an, wie sie geschehen sollten...Er sah auch das mindeste Gebet...das jemand sollte tun, und sah an, welches Gebet und welche Andacht er hören sollte; er sah, dass du ihn morgen willst mit Fleisz anrufen und mit Ernst bitten; und das Anrufen und Gebet wird Gott nicht morgen erhören; denn er hat es gehört in seiner Ewigkeit, ehe du Mensch wurdest. Ist aber dein Gebet nicht redlich und ohne Ernst, so wird es dir Gott nicht jetzt versagen, denn er hat es dir in seiner Ewigkeit versagt.²⁴

Satisfying though this conclusion may seem to the believer, it nevertheless has met with vigorous objection. Its critics claim it contains the same inherent difficulties as does Calvinistic predestination.²⁵ They say it actually implies that God has foreordained prayers and has embraced them within His immutable plan as predestinated factors; and since the act of prayer itself is predestinated, then, they believe, the answer or non-answer of prayer is likewise predestinated. The result of this view is said to deny both man and God of freedom in the realm of prayer. For if the act of praying is pre-arranged in eternity, it is impossible for the Christian to freely utter a prayer in time; and if God has immutably decreed in eternity to answer certain prayers, it cannot be said that He is free to answer all true prayers in time.²⁶ Besides, says Schleiermacher, to claim God arranged for prayers beforehand is to argue ad absurditum. Prayer cannot be predes-

²⁴Heiler, op. cit., p. 217.

²⁵Puglisi, op. cit., p. 5.

²⁶Biederwolf, op. cit., p. 113.

minated, since if it were, then prayers would actually be "Weissagungen" of the immutable manner in which God governs the world.²⁷ Man could then predict the future as accurately as God can!

The above criticisms are untenable, however. They fail to recognize a vastly important fact already established - namely, that conditional prayer must always be regarded as a secondary cause in the realm of providence. This fact protects the freedom of the Christian in the use of prayer as well as the freedom of God in the answer of prayer. The truth of these assertions may best be established by a study of the manner in which conditional prayer is effective as a secondary cause.

B. The Manner of Conditional Prayer's Efficacy

Martin Luther was convinced that valid prayer was efficacious.²⁸ He wrote:

Der Kirchen Gebet tut grosze Miracula. Es hat zu unser Zeit ihr' drei von den Todten auferweckt: Mich, der ich oft bin todtkrank gelegen, meine Hausfrau Käthe, die auch todtkrank war, und Philippum Melanchtonem, welcher Anno 1540 zu Weimar todtkrank lag; wiewohl liberatio a morbis et corporalibus periculis schlechte Miracula sein, jedoch sollt mans merken propter infirmitatem in fide.²⁹

²⁷Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 591.

²⁸The allusions of Luther to this aspect of prayer are many. The student is referred to his Von dem Gebet (St. Louis, XXII, 510 f.) for an excellent summarization of Luther's views regarding the nature and efficacy of prayer, the implications of which will be presented on subsequent pages of this study.

²⁹Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 64.

Nor is Luther alone in this conviction, for praying Christians of all centuries would certainly agree with him.

At this point, however, a question arises. In what sense is conditional prayer efficacious? The full answer to this question can of course never be given by man, for God nowhere reveals in every detail the manner of conditional prayer's efficacy. Nevertheless, certain observations may be made, all of which are implicit in the fact that conditional prayer is a second cause.

1. Conditional Prayer is Efficacious only as a Second Cause

As has now been noted, conditional prayer is efficacious only because God included it as a created cause in the realm of providence. Two additional facts are implicit in this basic truth, both of which also have already been implied. The first is that God not only established the fact of prayer, but that He also actually inspires, cooperates with, and uses true conditional prayer to help accomplish His purposes in the world. And the second is that God has arranged providence in such a manner that all valid conditional prayers can be assured of an answer. Both the means and the end of true prayer are therefore in the hands of God. In other words, conditional prayer is efficacious, but it is so only because God, who directs events to answer prayer, can and does also use prayer to direct certain events.

Some, however, would revise this phraseology to read, conditional prayer directs God to change events. Indeed, it is common for moderns to conceive of prayer as a private instrument which may be wielded with astonishing efficacy as a cosmic force. The following is an example of such a view:

When we pray, God, in some manner, obeys our will, as he obeyed that of Joshua commanding the sun to stand still. "The Lord," says Scripture, "obeying the voice of man." (Josh. 10,14). God is almighty; and yet to this question of the psalmist: "Thou art terrible, and who shall resist thee?" (Ps. 75,8) we can answer: "Prayer," for prayer also is almighty, and in some sense, capable of overcoming God Himself.³⁰

The proponents of this view do not claim their prayers can change God's intention, for they admit that God's good and gracious end-purpose for the world cannot be thwarted by any activity of man.³¹ But they do hold that prayer forces a change of God's activity in the world. Prayer then does "move the arm that moves the world."³² This is possible, according to Fosdick, because a true prayer expresses the dominant desire of the petitioner. He writes, "Prayer is the central and determining force of a man's life. Prayer is dominant desire, calling God into

³⁰Ferreol Girardey, A Treatise on Prayer. (New Orleans: T. Fitzwilliam and Co., 1885), p. 10.

³¹Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Meaning of Prayer (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1915), p. 69.

³²Biederwolf, op. cit., p. 76.

alliance."³³ Another aspect of this same view is the common one which says prayer is efficacious because through it man expresses a type of telepathetic energy.³⁴ Prayer telegraphs man's needs to God and influences God's actions in man's favor. Or if man intercedes for another in prayer, then his telepathy is directed horizontally so as to effect the object of his intercession. At least, S. S. Schmucker seems to espouse this theory:

Perhaps one other mode of beneficial influence (of prayer) may be added...It is proved by the experiments in animal magnetism, that the intense exertion of one mind directed upon another, does in many cases exert a homogeneous influence on the latter, so that the person operated on, shall become conscious that the other is thinking of him and exerting an influence on him. May it not be possible then, that our intense prayer for an individual, may thus exert an influence on his mind and feelings we cherish for him?³⁵

There is still another variation of the belief that prayer may be used to influence God and the world. Prayer is effective, it is said, because it merits the answer it seeks from God.³⁶ The reasoning of those who support this view is obvious. Since God has promised to answer prayer, the Christian who prays in faith has a claim on God's grace. Prayer then is as "a blank check signed by the Almighty

³³Fosdick, op. cit., p. 149.

³⁴Puglisi, op. cit., p. 5.

³⁵S. S. Schmucker, Elements of Popular Theology (Philadelphia: S. S. Miles, 1834), pp. 181-182.

³⁶Girardey, op. cit., p. 10.

which we could fill in at will and present to the universe to be cashed."³⁷

These views are of course at variance with both the nature of valid prayer and the nature of providence. They distort the basic truth that conditional prayers are a force included in providence, because they exalt man's freedom in prayer and minimize God's power in providence. It is unbiblical to hold that man can bend God's will to his own. Nor can it be said that man, through his praying, can enlighten God or prevail upon Him to alter His plan for the world. And to think that prayer exerts its efficacy through telepathy is certainly also contrary to the nature of prayer and providence. The believer would scarcely look upon telepathy as the instrument of intercession, for this would make man responsible for prayer's efficacy. Even science, which once so fervently tried to establish the reality of telepathy, now tends more toward its denial. Dr. Karl Ruf Stolz is quoted as roundly affirming: "The evidence for telepathic marvels is scientifically untenable."³⁸ But the most serious shortcoming of the above theories is that all of them fail to give full credence to the nature of God. When men begin to look upon prayer as a means of coercing God, they show they have lost their vision of the

³⁷Fosdick, op. cit., p. 29.

³⁸Puglisi, op. cit., p. 6.

wise power with which God rules the universe. The prayer of "coercive cosmic force" can hardly be addressed to the God who rules wisely and well in providence; such a prayer is better addressed to an animistic force, sublimated and spiritualized, but perfectly under the control of man.³⁹ And if men who pray for opposing causes should pray to a God who is coerced by prayer, think of the havoc which would result should their prayers be answered according to their desires!

Certainly, all of this is far removed from the Biblical view of prayer's efficacy. The Bible does of course freely admit that valid conditional prayer avails much with God. But it does not thereby mean to say that man can influence or coerce God's will through his praying. It rather points to the very opposite: conditional prayer is efficacious only because of and through God's will. This means, in the first place, that God allows conditional prayer to be an efficient force in the realm of providence. The proof for this lies not only in the fact that God included the efficacy of prayer in his plan for the world, but also in the fact that He promises to answer prayer. The man who would pray effectively must acknowledge these facts. Indeed, when a Christian prays validly, he really is confessing, not in an abstract or theoretical sense but in a very practical

³⁹Puglisi, op. cit., p. 6.

sense, that he is under divine governance. And so in his prayer he will obviously not seek to dictate to God, but will rather humbly place his petition at the disposal of God. Such prayer is never in opposition to the designs of providence, "for when we pray we begin to wish in time what God wills for us from all eternity."⁴⁰ A second major fact must be added however, if the full implications of this matter are to be understood. Conditional prayers are efficacious not only because of God's eternal will, but also because they are means through which God exerts His will in providence. According to the clear testimony of the Bible, God has chosen to rule His world through created means. Or more specifically, He has graciously promised His power to second causes, thereby enabling them to fulfill His purposes for and in the world. Valid conditional prayers, being secondary causes, are therefore subordinate instrumentaliter of God, which in a very real sense help in the sustaining and governing of the whole universe.⁴¹ One may therefore conclude that true conditional prayers are efficacious, but they are so only when they are humbly submitted to the will of God.

The above discussion might leave the impression that God needs prayer to accomplish certain things. To be sure,

⁴⁰Garrigou-Lagrange, op. cit., p. 210.

⁴¹J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), pp. 431-432.

exactly such a deduction is widely supported by modern thought. Even such differing minds as those of Bishop Gore and Doctor Fosdick are agreed in this one idea. According to the Bishop, "There are multitudes of things which God means to give us, but will not give us unless we pray for them."⁴² Perhaps this sounds innocent enough, but another Bishop, Dr. Trench, expresses the point more pertly. "Prayer," he writes, "is giving God an opportunity to do what He wants."⁴³ Fosdick, however, carries this thought almost to the point of exhaustion. He devotes four pages of his book on prayer to proving that God is dependent upon, and bound by, men's prayer, because until men cooperate with Him in prayer, there are certain things which He cannot say or give to them.⁴⁴ When one summarizes the thought of all three men, one notes the following: God holds in reserve certain blessings intended for man which He cannot grant unless they be prayed for; therefore it becomes the duty of man to influence God's intention through prayer and thus make it possible for God to bestow His prepared blessings.

Although these views are palatable to the modern mind, they nevertheless are in essential disagreement with Biblical thought. God is not "bound" to a certain course

⁴²Gore, op. cit., p. 10.

⁴³Fosdick, op. cit., p. 64.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 65-68.

of action by the means he created. Nor does He "need" the prayers of men in order to accomplish His will. He who is illimitably free to raise up the very stones of the field in His service if man refuses to cooperate with His purposes, is also free to accomplish His ends without the prayers of man.⁴⁵ In addition to thus minimizing the free nature of God, the above view also distorts the nature of prayer. It makes of prayer a type of meritorious signal which attracts God's attention and arouses Him to action. Wishart saw the danger of such a view. He writes:

If...individual prayers...affect the divine Spirit... as determinate signals in a mighty plan upon the appearance of which an act of love becomes due - then ...with such a conviction intensely stamped upon the mind, it would be totally impossible to pray.⁴⁶

Nor, for that matter, would prayer be validly efficacious if it expects to give God the opening for action.

Nevertheless, the views of the above men do point toward a fascinating consideration. On the one hand, Scripture denies that prayer coerces God, yet on the other it does indeed indicate that God bestows some gifts only "in response to earnest solicitation."⁴⁷ For example, there is the word of God Himself: "I will yet for this be

⁴⁵Luke 19:40.

⁴⁶Wishart, op. cit., p. 97.

⁴⁷Coats, op. cit., p. 86.

enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them."⁴⁸ Or again, "Ask what I shall give thee."⁴⁹ And then there is the testimony of James, "Ye have not because ye ask not."⁵⁰ Even though one should interpret these passages in the most cautious manner, one would still have to admit they indicate God withholds certain blessings if they are not prayed for. This is true because failure to pray is a symptom of unbelief, and God will not force his gifts irresistably upon those who do not pray because of their unbelief. It would seem then that God has actually made certain aspects of His providential activity contingent upon prayer. At least, this would be in keeping with the concept of prayer as a secondary means. Nevertheless, God's activity is sovereign in itself, and cannot be influenced by prayer; however, His activity is also gracious, which means He desires to receive and answer prayer. Here Vorwerk quotes Wilhelm Walther as teaching,

Der erhabene, unveränderliche Gott braucht nicht Gebete zu erhören, er will es aber, weil er die Liebe ist. Auch die Weisheit Gottes hindert ihn nicht, auf Menschengebete Rücksicht zu nehmen. Sie hat nur zur Folge, dass er bei solchen Gebeten der Menschen, welche Schädliches erbitten, die nötige Korrektur vornimmt und die Erhörung anders ausfallen lässt.⁵¹

⁴⁸Ez. 36:37.

⁴⁹I Kings 3:5.

⁵⁰James 4:2

⁵¹Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 616.

One may therefore conclude that God wills to produce certain salutary effects of prayer only when the prayer for those effects is actually expressed. This observation, of course, is but the expression of human short-sightedness, for nothing really is contingent with God. "All things," says Martin Luther, "are in reality done necessarily and immutably with respect to the will of God."⁵² Dr. Graebner offers a valuable comment in this connection:

On the one hand, the Christian is assured and comforted by the knowledge that there is no detail in his life which God has not included in His counsels and has predetermined before the individual is born. Of that we are assured through example and testimony by the entire Scriptures. Yet these same Scriptures impress upon us the necessity of prayer and make the course of our life, the success of our undertakings, the escape from perils, contingent upon prayer.⁵³

Thus the conditional prayers of a Christian do avail much. They bring back "blessings from the throne of grace,"⁵⁴ because they are secondary means. But does this mean that a conditional prayer is actually a channel through which God wills to bestow His gifts of grace? There are many who believe it is just this. "Prayer," St. John Climacus wrote, "is the source of all virtue; it is the channel through

⁵²Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, translated by Ny. Cole (Grand Rapids: Erdman's, 1931), p. 38.

⁵³Theo. Graebner, "Predestination and Human Responsibility," Concordia Theological Monthly, V (March, 1934), 170.

⁵⁴J. M. Reu, Christian Ethics (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), p. 186.

which flow to us all Christ's graces and all divine gifts; it is the best and most necessary means of advancing in virtue."⁵⁵ Lest this be taken as a view peculiar alone to the Romanists, let it be noted also that even some Lutherans consider prayer as a means of grace. The Danish Bishop Martensen, by way of example, wrote: "And prayer has also been given to us by our Lord as a means of grace, which we are to use along with the other means of grace, and which we can always have with us."⁵⁶ And then there is S. S. Schmucker, who in his dogmatics discusses prayer in connection with the means of grace. He writes: "Prayer is actually the means of procuring for us the blessings which we seek, and which, without it, we would not have attained."⁵⁷ Or, on the contemporary scene, one notes how Dr. Aulen of Sweden calls prayer a means of grace.⁵⁸ Dr. Huggenvik offers the following comment in reference to Aulen's view:

There can be nothing radically wrong in calling prayer a Means of Grace if we assume that it helps us to be put in such a relationship to God that we become receptive to the grace that flows through His word to us.⁵⁹

⁵⁵Girardey, op. cit., p. 12.

⁵⁶H. Martensen, Christian Ethics. First Division: Individual Ethics (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.), p. 173.

⁵⁷S. S. Schmucker, op. cit., p. 186.

⁵⁸Theo. Huggenvik, We Believe (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1950), p. 46.

⁵⁹Ibid.

Nevertheless, those who regard prayer as a specific means of grace are standing in a slippery place. It is true, of course, that the term "means of grace" is an ecclesiastical and not a biblical phrase, and so one could conceivably alter its content. But when one applies this term to prayer and thereby places prayer on a par with the Word and sacraments, then one is on dangerous ground. To call prayer a specific means of grace is to confuse the proper relationship between God's grace and man's prayer. In the first place, grace causes prayer, and prayer does not occasion grace. Prayer is possible only after grace forgives the sins of a person, which is effected not through prayer, but through the Word of promise. The fact that a Christian feels strengthened by prayer is not because God's grace "flowed" to him through his act of praying. It would be better to say that this person's faith was strengthened by the gracious promise of God, upon which the believer bases his prayer and through which prayer is answered. The subjective answer then did not come by virtue of the prayer but by virtue of grace touching the person through God's Word. There is a second reason why it is dangerous to call prayer a specific means of grace. To place prayer on a par with the Word and sacraments comes dangerously close to Neoplatonism. Platonius, that avid disciple of Plato, had postulated both an objective mystic goal in the universe and a subjective mystic sense inherent

in man, which sense man only needs to discipline and develop if he is to achieve the objective goal of life.⁶⁰ The person who is subtly following Platonius believes grace comes through prayer, whether intentionally or not. He is guilty of minimizing the Gospel and exalting his natural capacities. Indeed, it becomes unnecessary for him to depend upon the Word and sacraments for spiritual life, because his praying wins grace from God. And even worse, this view tends to put man above the necessity of trusting solely in the merits of Christ, since it espouses the tenet that man can earn salvation by his own activity. Vorwerk's words provide a corrective for these ideas:

...alle Gebetserfahrungen und Gebetswunder bleiben der göttlichen Offenbarung...untergeordnet, können nichts davon umstoßen, nichts dazu hinzutun, sondern nur ihren Inhalt bestätigen und persönlich aneignen.⁶¹

Thus even though conditional prayer is a secondary means, it is certainly improper to call it a means of grace. True, it does result in "Gebetswunder." This, however, is due to God's activity, and not to man's activity of praying. The efficacy of conditional prayer does not come about through, much less because of, prayer. God, and only God makes conditional prayer efficaciously valid; He answers it by virtue of His gracious Word and promise. It is this fact which makes prayer an efficient force in the world.

⁶⁰P. H. Wicksteed, The Relations between Dogma and Philosophy (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), p. 262.

⁶¹Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 127.

This observation in turn gives rise to still another major question, viz., what is the relationship of the Christian to the efficacy of his prayers?

2. The Believer's Role in Conditional Prayer's Efficacy

One, of course, quite naturally hesitates to say that the believer has anything to do with the efficacy of his conditional prayers, because the sole causa efficiens of both the means and the end of true prayer is the gracious activity of God. Yet God does work in and through the believer, and in this sense the Christian does have a share in making conditional prayers effective. This fact is best understood by studying the relationship of God's Spirit to the faith which prays.

a. The Holy Spirit and the Efficacy of Man's Prayer.

The work of the Holy Spirit really determines the part man plays in the efficacy of prayer. For besides engendering the faith in man which prays, the Spirit also prays in, for, and with the believer, thereby enabling him to participate in the efficacy of prayer.

This activity is begun when the Holy Spirit creates true faith in man. The Spirit then grasps man through the Word of promise and places him in such a relationship to God that he can pray. The sinner is now restored to sonship with the Father. But the Spirit does even more. He also instructs the believer in the purposes of God, and assures him of God's just and gracious providence over all

matters. In fact, this assurance becomes an inner conviction of the regenerated one, because the Spirit actually plants the Word of promise in the believer's innermost soul and there then testifies concerning the trustworthiness of that promise.⁶² Through this inner testimony, the Spirit actually prays in the heart of the believer.⁶³ The faith nurtured in this manner cannot but pour out its Spirit-led desires in fervent prayer.⁶⁴ Such prayer is certainly efficacious, for because of the Spirit's inner testimony, it is based upon the will and promises of God.

Yet God's Spirit does more to make Christian conditional prayer efficacious. He also prays for the believer. Nowhere is this fact expressed more strikingly than in Romans:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.⁶⁵

In tracing Paul's thought in this passage, one notes how the Spirit actually aids the praying believer by praying for him. This is necessary because the infirmity of sin still affects the Christian, and therefore he cannot pray

⁶²John 15:26.

⁶³Gal. 4:6.

⁶⁴Eph. 2:18.

⁶⁵Rom. 8:26-27.

as he ought. But He whose strength is made perfect in man's weakness, rescues the prayer of the infirm one. The Spirit, in short, comes and prays for the Christian the prayer which the Christian could never have hoped to pray alone. He utilizes the deepest groanings of the believer and shapes them into effective prayer. Even more, He actually intercedes for the cause of the believer. As the true Advocate and Paraclete, the Spirit speaks in man's behalf before the throne of grace, and pleads there for all the deep and hidden needs of man's welfare. And in so doing, the Spirit intercedes for those very things which God desires to graciously grant. The Spirit, therefore, truly prays in and for man, in a manner comporting with God's will. Herein lies an important observation as regards conditional prayer: the Christian who prays conditionally knows that his poor groanings, which he cannot ever utter in the full knowledge of God's will, are guided and directed by the Spirit in such a way that they will be graciously answered.

All these facts culminate in another truth. The Spirit who prays in and for the believer also prays with the believer. Here one comes face to face with the mystical union of the Holy Spirit with the believer. In fact, one could say that the mystery of man's relationship to conditional prayer's efficacy is the mystery of God's spiritual union with man, for the fact that God is constantly

present and at work in the soul of the believer carries tremendous implications for the concept of the believer's activity in prayer. It means, on the one hand, that God is continually enabling the believer to pray as He wants him to pray. He promotes an ever increasing knowledge of, and obedience to, His will within the Christian. Because of this gracious activity, the believer learns to actually submit God's cause to God ever more and more in his conditional prayers. And, on the other hand, the reality of the mystical union means, as has been implied so often, that God is the source of all the spiritual power which the Christian exercises in prayer. The Christian prays by virtue of God's power, and his prayer is effective through this power. This is but another way of saying that the Holy Spirit develops both the faith in prayer and the prayer in faith, since the more He increases the faith which prays, the more He also increases man's participation in the efficacy of conditional prayer. It remains now to observe more closely the nature of this Spirit-nurtured faith which prays effectively.

b. The Nature of the Faith which Prays Efficaciously.

The faith which avails in prayer is certainly not of a self-assertive nature. That would be contrary to the very essence of conditional prayer. The Christian who prays conditionally knows he has absolutely no claim upon God, and therefore when he prays, he assents completely to God's

way with the world. Here one observes first of all that the faith which avails in conditional prayer is a submissive and receptive faith.

Luther expressed these facts in his usual striking way. The faith that prays is "reine Empfänglichkeit," he says.⁶⁶ It possesses nothing, and deserves nothing; and yet it seeks undeserved aid. Luther depicts it as "die hohle Hand des Bettlers, der eine Gabe begehrt."⁶⁷ A man who prays with this attitude knows he cannot do anything to help effect the answer to his prayer, and therefore he waits patiently upon the Lord. He may indeed pray with great passion, but nevertheless, if he prays validly, he asks everything in submission to the will of his heavenly Father. He is willing to receive whatever God should grant, for he knows whatever God does grant, will be to the welfare of His kingdom.

These views are especially meaningful for efficacious conditional prayer. Such a prayer of necessity ought to proceed from a submissive but receptive faith. The believer might indeed pray conditionally for the recovery of a mortally ill person, but in so doing, he would not necessarily expect God to restore the dying one to health; he simply expects God to perform His good and gracious will

⁶⁶Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 145.

⁶⁷Ibid.

in behalf of the dying one. When the Christian intercedes with this attitude, he is satisfied that the Lord knows best. Certainly, the believer doesn't presume to know more than God does about the mysteries of sickness and suffering and death. He of course knows God could miraculously answer his prayer by restoring the dying one to health, but he doesn't know if that would be according to God's will in this specific instance, and therefore he doesn't demand a miraculous answer to his prayer. In this connection, one might remember the passage in James,⁶⁸ in which it is said that the believing prayer of the elder shall cure the sick. This passage, however, must be interpreted in the light of the Apostolic Age, when the Lord freely granted charismatic gifts of healing. Such charismatic gifts are no longer extant to the degree in which they once were in the days of the primitive Church.

Nevertheless, should one have a sincere conviction that a friend's sickness is not according to God's will, then one could expect a miraculous answer to a conditional prayer in his behalf. Vorwerk admits this possibility. "Freilich gibt es Gebete," he writes, "in denen eine zuversichtliche Gewisshheit über den Ausgang vorhanden ist, weil Gottes Geist die Zuversicht geweckt hat, Gott werde

⁶⁸James 5:14-15.

erhören.⁶⁹ A petition of this type really belongs in the realm of heroic faith.⁷⁰ Excellent examples of such prayers are Luther's intercessions for the restoration of the dying Melancton and Myconius to health. It is interesting to note the nature of the Reformer's prayer in behalf of Myconius, as he himself recorded it:

Der Herr lasse mich nicht hören so lange ich lebe, dasz Du gestorben bist, sondern mache, dasz Du mich überlebst. Dies bitte ich, dies will ich, und mein Wille soll geschehen, Amen, weil dieser Wille die Ehre des Namens Gottes, sicherlich nicht mein Vergnügen und Wohlsein sucht.⁷¹

This prayer was answered, as is well known. Yet even so, the very words of Luther's petition reflect how even his heroic faith was essentially of a submissive and receptive type.

His example, however, points out an additional aspect of the faith which avails in prayer. Such faith is also trusting and confident in nature. The Christian who prays conditionally, therefore, trusts in the promises to answer prayer.

Really, the only way the Christian can avail in prayer is to trust completely in the promises of God. Luther said, "Wir können mit Gott niemals anders handeln als

⁶⁹Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 621.

⁷⁰J. T. Mueller, op. cit., p. 433.

⁷¹Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 73.

durch den Glauben an sein Verheisungswort."⁷² This means that when the Christian prays, he on the one hand actually is reminding God of His promises, and on the other is confident that God will answer prayer because of His promises. "Ich rieb Gott die Ohren mit seinen Verheisungen,"⁷³ Luther writes, in explanation of his effectual prayer for Melancthon's restoration from near death.

Here then one comes closest to seeing what part the believer plays in making conditional prayer effective. To quote Luther again, "Unser Gebet erlangt alles von Gott, nicht durch eigene Kraft oder Vermögen, sondern weil es auf Gottes Verheisung traut."⁷⁴ But again this must be noted: it is not man who avails in prayer; it is rather his faith, born through the Word of promise and relying in that same Word of promise, which avails. Werner Elert expresses this fact quite well. He writes,

Aber was sollte denn das Wort Christ von dem Glauben, der Berge versetzt (Mtt. 17,20), heißen, wenn der Glaube nicht imstande wäre, das Unmögliche möglich zu machen! Er sagt nicht, dass der Mensch dazu imstande ist, sondern der Glaube.⁷⁵

Such a faith submits all to the promises of God, and then is confident God will answer its supplication.

⁷²Ibid., p. 156.

⁷³Ibid., p. 70.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 99.

⁷⁵Werner Elert, Der Christliche Glaube (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1940), p. 349.

When the Christian prays conditionally, he is therefore assured that his petition will be answered in such measure and manner as will best serve the purposes of God's providence. How or when God will answer his prayer, the believer cannot know; nor does he know definitely what the answer to his prayer will be. He cheerfully leaves all these matters to his Father's wisdom and will, because he is convinced that in some form or other God will fulfill His promises to answer all valid conditional prayers.

Luther once said:

All who call upon God earnestly and in true faith will surely be heard and receive according to their petition; though perhaps not at the very hour and time nor in the measure of their petition nor exactly what they pray for, yet they will receive something much better, greater, and more glorious.⁷⁶

The prayer which rises from such a trusting confidence is certainly included and utilized by God in His gracious work of providence.

In conclusion, then, let it be noted that conditional prayer is efficaciously valid. This is true not only because God desires prayer and promises to answer it, but also because He actually enables the Christian to pray according to His will in providence. The Christian therefore prays what God Himself desires, since God's Spirit prays in, for, and with him. Thus through His own gracious activity, God has included all true conditional prayers in

⁷⁶Reu, op. cit., p. 182.

the order of the efficacious conditions and means of His providence, has counted upon such prayer in His eternal will for the world, and gives such prayer expression in His governance of the world. Perhaps no words summarize these facts better than Luther's:

Es geschehe was da wolle, so richten wir alles durchs Gebet aus, welches allein die allmächtige Kaiserin ist; durchs Gebet leiten wir, was geordnet ist, bringen zurecht, was geirret ist, tragen, was nicht gebessert werden kann, überwinden alles Unglück und erhalten alles Gute.⁷⁷

⁷⁷Vorwerk, op. cit., p. 62.

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