

relations and with all the life at his disposal. The Christian and the church represent the new humanity in Christ.

Now, if it is true that Jesus Christ is the true man and that his resurrection is the new beginning for all men to become true men in him, what is there in the man Jesus Christ which man can now begin being and doing? In what sense is the man Jesus true man which the resurrection vindicates? I cannot give a full answer here. But I can give you the answer of Jesus to John the Baptist. When John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to inquire of Jesus whether he was in fact "he who is to come," the reply of Jesus was: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Luke 7:19-22 RSV). If Asia is looking for the image of the true man, then it is in some such activity which the true man did that it may yet find the answer.

## *Prayer and Action*

For many people today there could hardly be a greater antithesis than that between a man of prayer and a man of action. Prayer seems to be an incredible kind of private exercise—a one-way conversation with someone who, at least in a literal sense, cannot be supposed to hear the words we are addressing to him, still less to continue the conversation. To many, prayer seems at best an imaginative exercise, at worst self-deception—at any rate, far removed from getting things done.

If the farmer wants a good crop of apples, is it not more sensible to spray fertilizers than to promote prayers? As for the labors of men, another theme of Rogationtide prayers, does not our best hope lie in improving collective bargaining and setting up a commission of industrial relations? If we want to be kept safe on a plane journey is it not best to check on metal fatigue, to insist on a pilot's reliability tests, and to get the meteorologists to check for turbulence and thunderstorms, rather than to say a prayer as the plane starts to move? From another direction, does not the practice of prayer, by contrast with other ways of getting things done, only underline the church's practical ineffectiveness? Or worst still, there is the idea that prayer may be some kind of magical incantation to be used when all else fails. The doctor says to the patient: "I've done all I can; I know of no other practical possibilities. I suggest that you pray—it can't do any harm." Quoiest remarks significantly in a comment which links together these preliminary reflections:

Among those who do not pray or pray little or badly, there are to be found some who do not believe in prayer, thinking that activity alone is more urgent and more useful. There are some others who look upon prayer as a magical incantation and hence they use it to satisfy all their needs and wants, even the most overtly material ones. There are

some others who would like to pray but who claim that they can't or that they don't know how. In all these cases, it would seem that prayer is not being properly evaluated for what it is—an act of faith. Modern man, the slave of efficiency and utility—sometimes in spite of himself—tends to think of prayer in terms of profit and loss. Prayer can not be understood in such pragmatic terms and such a view can never lead to an authentic prayer life.<sup>1</sup>

What then do we expect from prayer? Can we be intellectually honest and still pray? Can we pray with integrity?

Such questions as these are undoubtedly haunting and troubling very many people today—whether in parish churches or universities—and what this chapter attempts to do is to offer an approach to prayer which can help us grapple with and think through difficulties such as these.

Recalling some of the difficulties mentioned at the start of this chapter, what do we suppose to be the function of words in prayer? It is twofold. First, the words are meant to provide us with an inroad into God's presence, with a verbal pathway to worship, to a disclosure of God. Second they are meant to provide us with meditations and reflections, with discourse appropriate to our being in God's presence. In this sense the discourse is basically man-oriented. A particular prayer may have, and the best prayers always will have, both these functions. They are evident in a prayer of Paul Gerhardt quoted in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*:

O Lord, God,  
Great is the misery that has come upon me;  
My cares would overwhelm me,  
I know not what to do.  
O God, be gracious unto me and help me.  
Grant me strength to bear what thou dost send,  
and let not fear rule over me.  
As a loving Father, take care of my loved ones  
My wife and children.

O merciful God, forgive me all  
the sins I have committed against thee,  
and against my fellowmen.

<sup>1</sup> Michel Quoist, *The Christian Response* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1965), pp. 174-75.

I trust in thy grace and commit my  
life wholly into thy hands,  
Do with me as seemeth best to thee, and as  
is best for me.

Whether I live or die, I am with thee,  
and thou art with me, my God.  
Lord, I wait for thy salvation,  
and for thy Kingdom.  
Amen.

• • •

Every Christian in his place  
should be brave and free,  
with the world face to face,  
Though death strikes, his spirit should  
persevere, without fear  
calm and good.

For death cannot destroy  
but from grief brings relief  
and opens gates to joy.

Closed the door of bitter pain,  
bright the way where we may  
all heaven gain.

In these paragraphs we can find words which provide an inroad into God's presence—see lines 1-4 and words suited to its attainment, e.g., lines 13-14 and 17-20. Other phrases might be constructed either way. Certainly, within these first two paragraphs are appropriate meditations and reflections which point forward to the reflections contained in the third paragraph, which I should regard as one with the prayer itself.

Again, consider these prayers by Quoist. Like all his prayers, they provide at the start novel and contemporary inroads into God's presence, and then at the start of the second paragraph is discourse appropriate to being in that presence, words of meditation and reflection.

#### *The Telephone*

I have just hung up; why did he telephone?  
I don't know . . . Oh! I get it . . .

I talked a lot and listened very little.

Forgive me, Lord; it was a monologue and not a dialogue.  
I explained my idea and did not get his;

Since I didn't listen, I learned nothing,  
 Since I didn't listen, I didn't help,  
 Since I didn't listen, we didn't commune.

Forgive me, Lord, for we were connected,  
 And now we are cut off.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Subway*

The last ones squeeze in.  
 The doors rolls shut.  
 The subway rumbles off.  
 I can't move.

I am no longer an individual, but a crowd,  
 A crowd that moves in one piece like jellied soup in its can.

A nameless and indifferent crowd, probably far from you, Lord.  
 I am one with the crowd, and I see why it's sometimes hard for me to  
 rise higher.

This crowd is heavy—leaden soles on my feet, my slow feet—a crowd  
 too large for my overburdened skiff.

Yet, Lord, I have no right to overlook these people; they are my  
 brothers,

And I cannot save myself, alone.

Lord, since you wish it, I shall make for heaven "in the subway."<sup>3</sup>

Since the words of prayer have the two-fold function I have now illustrated, we may say that prayers contain discourse which the philosophers would call "performative." They contain words in the saying of which some action is intended, as it is for example when in saying some words we name a ship, make a promise, or pronounce someone to be husband or wife. In the situation which is then created by some of the words of prayer, other words expressing reflection and meditation become appropriate.

That being the function of words in prayer how do we rightly construe being in God's presence? What language is appropriate to such a situation as this? In what kind of overall conceptual context can we set our prayers? Luke's account of some of our Lord's teaching on prayer may help us toward an answer: The disciples' request, "O Lord teach us to pray," was answered

<sup>2</sup> M. Quoiat, *Prayers* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

by giving them an actual prayer—the Lord's Prayer—and then some hints as to the kind of conceptual context which prayer presupposes, the kind of transaction they should suppose prayer to be.

A friend comes to us at midnight for bread, but human friendship alone does not win an immediate response: "Trouble me not"—"Do not bother me." In this case it is only shameless persistence which eventually wins a response and secures for the caller not just three loaves but as many loaves as he wishes—"Whatsoever things he needeth." So in the human case, something far less honorable than friendship leads to a generous response. As the New English Bible translates it, "Even if he will not provide for him out of friendship, the very shamelessness of the request will make him get up and give him all he needs." A general conclusion is that prayer is an awareness of an activity meeting our own, a response to our initiative. Now, a further point. "Is there a father among you who will offer his son a snake when he asks for fish, or a scorpion when he asks for an egg?" We may continue the contrasts in a modern idiom—"or chalk when he asks for cheese?" The implication is not that a request for a fish necessarily brings a fish or that one for cheese necessarily brings cheese. It is rather that the response will not be inappropriate. It will be neither useless nor harmful. It will be a positive response—"If you then in being human, fathers and the rest, respond appropriately or at least not inappropriately to requests, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit!"—which I would alternatively expand into: "How much more shall you be aware of the activity of God meeting your own in an appropriate response—neither useless nor harmful!"

Here then is the conceptual background which prayer presupposes—a concept of God and his activity, an activity meeting our own across the frontier of the natural world and ourselves as part of that world. But this leads to the question: On what grounds can this cluster of concepts be defended? Does prayer have a concept of God which is philosophically credible?

Though the question cannot be answered in detail, it must certainly be raised, and I will now attempt an outline answer. Belief in God is to be grounded, I would claim, in what I call "dislosure situations"—situations which differ significantly from plain, flat, straightforward situations, a difference which is often

referred to by speaking of disclosure situations in terms of words like "depth," "a new dimension," a situation which when it occurs, leads us to speak metaphorically of "the ice breaking" or "the light dawning." We can recall many such situations which, on the subjective side, are situations of self-awareness when we become aware of our subjectivity, of who we really are. But the particular kind of disclosure situation which is the basis of belief in God is further distinctive in being such that nothing in principle is excluded from it. There are some disclosure situations, in other words, where we are in principle confronted by the whole universe. These will be situations where we are aware of an all-compelling moral obligation, or find ourselves giving a total commitment to some person or cause. In these cases I speak of a "cosmic disclosure."

Now there is no reason to suppose more than one objective reference for such cosmic disclosure situations. There is no more reason to suppose more than one individuation for all such situations than there is reason to suppose more than one total universe. That which is individuated in such a disclosure situation, and of whose activity we are then aware, is to be called God.

Further, in any and every disclosure situation we are always relatively passive until we respond in wonder and awe, i.e., we are aware of an activity confronting our own, to which we eventually respond. This active character of what individuates itself in a disclosure situation is made plain by the very metaphors used of it, which all describe activities. But since we know ourselves as active in relation to and in response to an activity which confronts our own, we have here a word—"activity"—which carries over univocally between God and ourselves. Here, then, is an outline philosophical defense of the conceptual framework which talk of prayer demands and implies.

So in prayer we become aware of God's activity bearing on our own and model this in personal terms, speaking for instance of God's will. But while the will is a central concept in our understanding of God and in particular in our talk of prayer, let us realize, especially when problems start to emerge, that even this concept of will is only a way of our being articulate about the activity where God discloses himself. Further, recalling that God's activity embraces the whole infinite universe, while our activity ranges over no more than a finite part, we can

readily see that the personal model must necessarily be qualified if our language of faith, and the words of our prayers in particular, are to be appropriate discourse for leading us to God or providing appropriate reflections in his presence.

So in our prayers we should be articulate in God's presence about the world and people and ourselves as with a friend, but *without restriction of range*. We shall share gratitude, hope, anxieties, wishes, but be in no way inhibited or restricted. With God all hearts can be completely open, all desires made fully known, and from God no secrets whatsoever need be hid. Broadly speaking, then, prayers will have a personal structure while always acknowledging the necessary qualification. We may now see why models like "king" and "judge" occur with the frequency they do. Quite apart from their traditional location in biblical context, here are persons surrounded with awe, persons who are more than persons. Kings and judges are persons, but with important differences.

We may here conveniently recall some of the popular phrases by which prayer has been elucidated. Prayer has been said to be "walking and talking with God"; it has been alternatively described as a "dialogue with God." Insofar as these phrases derive from, call up, and take us back to the personal model they are excellent and undoubtedly much better than some impersonal models such as the slot machine or manipulation techniques, or still more the pressure model by which it is supposed that a thousand prayers are a thousand times better than one. Even so, the limitations of those phrases, improvements though they be, must be realized, and this is sometimes acknowledged by qualifying the first phrase used—"walking and talking with God"—by adding "letting God do most of the talking." This is better insofar as it cautions us against prolixity. But we ought still to be somewhat nervous of the phrase insofar as it depends too heavily on the "talking" model. For in some ways prayers are best seen as inroads into a silence, a silence which is the meeting place of ourselves and God. The invitations of the travelers of the unknown companion on the Emmaus road—these are the speech-acts, comparable to prayer. But the meeting place is in a moment of silence, a point of vanishing, though from the silence comes a dedication and a resolution to go back there and then to Jerusalem.

We can now see why in one sense the first and last prayer

will be "Thy will be done." For that phrase, when rightly understood, is in no way expressive of hopeless resignation, but rather expressive of a hoped-for harmony between, on the one hand, the pattern of life and meditations and reflections we have explicated in our prayers, and, on the other hand, the activity of God which we know in response. "All as God will . . ." Suffice it, as Whittier's hymn phrases it, that we discern a providence of love disclosing itself, expressing itself actively through all the events of our lives, creating a pattern whose character becomes clearer over the passage of the years. It is this broad providential discernment which is the ultimate hope of prayer. Prayer then will always aim to create a pattern which can be a symbol of, and through which can be expressed, a harmonious cooperation between God and ourselves—expressing a love whose response is love.

So individually and corporately we shall start in prayer from where we are, with all the unspeakable horrors, the agonizing anxieties, the exciting possibilities, and the fervent hopes that are ours—and we shall articulate them in the presence of God, looking for a disclosure of his will, when his sovereign love, his redemption, his grace, his life-giving spirit—describe it how we will—activates us. So the climax of prayer will be a community going out in service to his will—prayer and action. "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven"—shall know God's sovereign activity—but he that doeth the will . . ." We are urged: "Be not hearers"—and for a greater relevance to prayer I would add "or talkers"—"but doers of the word." So in prayer a phrase that merely slips off our lips or just comes to the eye is of no use whatsoever, and its repetition is in these circumstances no necessary improvement. A prayer has to be made our own and said in such a developable context that, as the pattern is increased imaginatively and realistically, the hope can be that God will disclose himself, and that we ourselves shall become alive in a total commitment, when our prayer will be fulfilled in inspired action.

There is a broad background approach to prayer, and it might help now to give an example. Suppose we are bidden to pray for the peace of the world. What is needed is that by knowledge and imagination we construct a picture of warfare between nations and strife within them and offer it to God in all its moral repugnance; or we may picture nations in harmony

and offer this in knowledge and imagination to God in all its moral value. This way our prayers provide that milieu—that imaginative matrix—in which we hope that God's saving activity will be disclosed and revealed. But we let God's active response be what it will. What he will do about those nations we will not trouble to predict. For a prediction of the details of divine reaction is a futile if not blasphemous activity on our part. But at least we can hope—and the reasonableness of this hope and belief is a point to which we can return later—that there will not be an inappropriate response on God's part, and that as far as we ourselves are concerned we will be empowered and inspired in some way or another to forward the peace of the world and fellowship between men. Against this background I see no difficulty in praying "about" (as it will be said) the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, whether before or during or after it. It is not a matter of egging God on to take this or that executive action. What difference God's activity which takes shape around our prayer will make, or how it will make it—as I have said, we have surely enough problems on our hands without trying to speculate in profitless areas like this. But that does not mean that there will be *no* response on God's part—only that it is profitless to speculate about its detailed character. To put it alternatively: suffice it that in prayer we have offered ourselves to God for his use and given, if we may so phrase it, opportunity to God to locate his activity in a particular direction and one particular enough—and here is the rub—to include ourselves. Meanwhile, the "answer" of God will always be a response of love rather than the message of the answering machine, still less of the machine which tells us our weight and our fortune and provides us with fruit gums as well.

Perhaps we can now see what are the logical ingredients of a good Collect—a prayer to be shared by people corporately and often repeated:

- (1) Its introductory language must specify an inroad into God's presence and be logically suited to and adequate for that task. This will mean that it will contain personal words suitably qualified, e.g., "almighty and everlasting," "of *all* power and might," "the author of *all* Godliness," "of *all* power and might, who are the author and giver of *all* things."
- (2) Its phrases must be consistent with our doctrine of God.

E.g., how far can we speak consistently of God's redeeming love freely offered in Christ to all men, and yet of his leading a particular nation to victory in war?

- (3) Its meditations and reflections must cover circumstances of very general appeal on which everyone's imagination can easily focus and readily develop, circumstances which also have a deep appeal to us. It may be possible to use in prayers phrases like "for the needs of Vietnam" or "for the needs of Nigeria," but the condition of their suitability will be that the phrase falls into a context well-suited to the congregation's knowledge and imagination.
- (4) It must name a situation or some state of affairs which provides an opportunity for the proving in principle of God's will in action, whether as directed to ourselves or influencing in some way the circumstances we have named.

So far, I have been giving a philosophy of prayer in general and discussing in general terms our initiative and God's response. In the next section I propose to come to a firmer grip with this matter of God's response, "answers" to prayers.

Obviously on our general background—and as I have said—we can very rightly expect our prayers to provide that milieu in which God's saving activity can be displayed. In this way, prayer extends the incarnation of God, and here we have an important doctrinal cross-reference reminding us that in and by prayer we become more effective and faithful members of the body of Christ, the church, in which God is active, indeed which exists by and through the activity of God.

But now to come to the crunch. Traditionally men have formulated prayers for fine weather, prayers for recovery from sickness. Can we enumerate any principles which may guide us as we prepare this kind of milieu for offering to God? I think that we can, and I now list six such principles:

1. Our language must specify open possibilities, open at least in principle and as far as we know. The classic example given in this connection is that of David, who is described as praying and sorrowing for his child who had been born to him by Uriah's wife (II Samuel 12:15-23). But once the child was dead, the prayers were at an end. In other words, we cannot pray for guidance as we go to town to buy the right gift for a

friend's birthday, if it is early-closing day. Nor obviously can we pray for someone's appointment or election when the result has been publicly declared and generally known. But suppose it has been declared, and we ourselves have not heard it. While we obviously could not pray for the appointment as we would do if the election was still completely open, nevertheless we can still express in God's presence our hope and wish and concern. Here would be prayer whose optative character was at a maximum. It would also be prayer where the element of cooperation with God was at a minimum.

In this context we can see that whether we have prayers for fine weather largely depends on how far meteorology can be said to leave open possibilities. But there are other considerations as well—four of them: (a) do not let us fail to pray because we cannot see how God could have any particular machinery to change the weather. (b) Our prayer must obviously not involve moral or logical inconsistencies—it would be ridiculous to pray for fine weather for one place and rain for another when these were merely a few yards apart. (c) Further, our prayers should always be examined in relation to what we can do as the outreach of the prayer. For instance, prayer for fine weather is surely less objectionable if in fact it has something to do with an airlift to starving children, or relates to a longed-for children's picnic in which we ourselves are or can be involved, than if the prayer for fine weather relates to something quite trivial and which indeed could be done at any time. (d) In short, prayer for fine weather is the offering of a hope which is not plainly self-contradictory. But taking up an earlier reflection, if the whole weather pattern in fact is "closed," then our prayer may not match with God's activity as far as the weather goes. At the same time it may somewhat match God's activity as far as we ourselves go. For no prayer leaves us unchanged and always sets before us the need for some correlative action.

But already I have touched on the second principle to which I now turn.

2. Expressions and words used in prayers must be consistent morally and logically not only with our ideas of God and especially of God as loving and personal and our general theological map, but also with our map of the world.

Taking the first two principles together we might perhaps raise the question of prayers for victory over an enemy. We

can see how such a prayer might well fulfill condition one—the result may indeed be very open. But how far can our expectations that God would intervene on one side be consistent with our idea of God? True, this is a commonplace idea of the Old Testament. But I think the constructive remark to make at that point is that if it were known that we had a moral duty to engage the enemy, it might seem that all would be well. Suppose for instance the enemy were tyrannizing a native settlement and the navy were asked to use force. Would it be possible then to offer this strategy in prayer? Maybe, but even then it would be important to ensure that our idea of God was reliable and that any “answer” we contemplated did not violate our conditions for a reasonable discourse.

3. Our prayers must not presuppose manipulation of God, nor, as I have said, must they demand prior knowledge of the divine machinery. Even though we must of course have some idea of what we are asking God to do, our prayers must not be determined by our supposed knowledge or ignorance of the particular cosmic machinery by which the “results” can be brought about. We must certainly not be selective of our prayer concerns in a sort of superior way that presupposes that we ourselves are God and have access to cosmic blueprints.

4. We all know how our own effort can change the world and how by thought and skill we can be creative of changes in town and country. Prayer undoubtedly supposes that there is a sense in speaking of God’s activity as directed to a particular point and effecting something new in the universe. But in general terms this is only to believe in principle that God can act within the open texture of the universe, and certainly the Christian can have no fundamental difficulty with this concept. The Christian cannot in principle exclude God’s special activity in Christ from being effective in human nature and nature.

5. If what we have prayed for, for example the life of a dying friend, does not occur, let us be careful if we say “it is not God’s will.” For this may seem to carry the implication that God has deliberately caused with a particular intention the fact of the friend’s death. We should rather conclude that we have not ourselves on this occasion construed God’s activity aright; we have not construed a situation in harmony with the broad activity of God. On the other hand, if what we have prayed for does happen, then indeed we may become aware of God’s activ-

ity directed toward a particular event which has a striking association with our prayers. We have in these circumstances all the ingredients for calling the situation a miracle. But this can not be explicated as if our prayer had caused discontinuity in scientific law. Though this is another story, the explication of miracles in terms of a breach in scientific law is not only scientifically bogus, it is also theologically compromising. The claim for a miracle is simply no more and no less than a claim for God’s particular activity disclosed in a striking situation, an occasion where the interpretation of God as personal reaches maximum applicability.

To take a particular example as a brief illustration, let us consider the changing of water into wine at Cana as an actual historical incident. It was a “miracle” because the activity of God—his “glory”—was displayed around the evident nonconformity of the actual events, since normally we do not pour water into jars and get wine out of them.

Suppose now a team of scientists had been present on this occasion. Then plainly, like all good scientists, they would have seen here precisely that kind of nonconformity and irregularity, the concern with which is the lifeblood of scientific discovery. Let us suppose that after much inquiry a plainly satisfactory account could have been given of the whole incident in terms of some novel scientific generalizations. Then, as much as God can always be discerned in the regularities of the universe, so could these scientists have discovered God’s general activity around the water-wine incident. But this is not to say more than that from the same incident a concept of God’s personal activity could be reached (miraculous significance) as well as a concept of God’s universal activity in and through the total universe (scientific significance). Only when there was no element of surprise left in the universe, only when all possibility of nonconformity had disappeared—which is the same as saying that only when all scientific inquiry had also come to an end—would there be no possibility of situations which could give rise to two different explanations in terms of God.

The moral of this story is that we shall always be moving our areas of intercessory prayers as the scientist is always moving his area of concern, because both in prayer and in scientific discovery our concern is with what are, to date, nonconformities. Only when the universe was completely charted would interces-

sory prayer come to an end. But when that happened scientific discovery would also have come to an end, and there would be no justification in the natural world for speaking personally and a fortiori of God in terms of personal activity.

Meanwhile, intercessory prayer presupposes that we can speak of God's personal activity around some natural events, and the only problem it leaves us with is how to develop a concept of God complex enough to cover this claim as well as the claim made for the general activity of God through the regularities of the natural order. But to say that the problem is complex and intricate does not mean that it is insoluble, and the Christian Trinitarian concept of God at least is broad enough to include both types of activity and disclosure on the part of God.

6. To introduce the sixth point let us recognize that on the whole we know very little indeed about the depths of human personality, about our influence on one another, of thought transference, telepathy, and the like. But this means that prayers, so far as they involve us in depth, have, quite apart from all the considerations we have given so far, the possibility of important consequences and take place in a context of God's natural activity of which we may really know comparatively little. There is a vast amount about human relationships which is "open," and it is for this reason that prayers in this context have wide possibilities. At the same time we must certainly not allow this important psychological truth to lead us to give a purely psychological account of prayer, or to think that it makes prayers for other people easier because we may know in principle God's ways of working in these areas. It is rather that the language of our prayers in this area fits more readily into what we want to say about God and the world generally.

Prayer, then, is a speech-act in three movements wherein, first, are included our thoughts about the world and about ourselves, normally focused on some particular theme. These, second, take us into a moment of vision—a moment of silence—where God discloses himself. Then, third, there emerges a dedication. Prayer is a self-preparation, an articulation of ourselves in the hope that a cosmic disclosure will occur around that on which our articulation is directed. Prayer is like the setting out of the programs, the schedules, the presentation lists, the crash

barriers, the stands all expectant for, say, the royal visit. But there might be a postponement and it all seems to be of no avail, or the fog may come down and something entirely different happens. Alternatively, the whole thing may work smoothly and the preparations take on life, become symbols of and expressive of activity, and we come out of it with the conviction that it has been a memorable occasion to color the rest of our lives.

O. C. Quick spoke of intercessory prayer being a representative dedication, to God, of the total help which we give, or wish to give, constantly and in varying forms to the person for whom we intercede. (Cf. *Essays in Orthodoxy* [London: Macmillan, 1916], pp. 291 ff.) Broadening this view we may say that a time of prayer is a microcosm of the Christian life, a point at which our whole life focuses onto a speech-act, a small pattern of words, images, behavior, and behavior possibilities which we hope will be that center where God discloses himself and his loving power in Christ and from which we can return empowered and renewed, to grapple with the full pattern of Christian life and work. Entering into that speech-act which is prayer we hope to go from it empowered by God for that macrocosm which is our life and work in the world.

The moral is that it is quite improper to have prayers for Vietnam and Nigeria, for sick people, for the parishes of a diocese, and so on unless the actual problems some way or another form part of our lives as well—whether by work or gifts or protest marches or imagination or whatever it is. Prayer without practical support and secular outreach is empty, as secularity without prayer is unredeemed. We may recall again the conclusion of the passage from Michel Quoist which I quoted toward the start of this essay: "The modern world has . . . an urgent need for a life of prayer. Unless the members of a technological society are also men of adoration and praise, technology will enslave and ultimately destroy them."

"We want your prayers and your money." The old phrase can be very misleading. For prayers are not prayers unless the money comes as well, and the gift of money is no Christian dedication unless it has come as an outreach from a focal speech-act pointing back to the moment of vision which is prayer. Here is the way in which secularity and spirituality come together as one, and we are thus saved from the bleak inadequacies of the one or



the unworldly enthusiasm of the other. So action and prayer are two expressions of the one situation—in praying and in doing each fulfills the other. The deepest spirituality and the most active participation are one.

It may now help to give a brief summary of the argument of this chapter.

#### Summary

1. Prayer is the attaining, enjoying, or recapturing of an awareness of God (a "disclosure situation"), and the function of words in prayer is to provide:

- (a) an inroad into God's presence, and/or
- (b) appropriate meditation in his presence

2. When we are in the presence of God, when God has disclosed himself to us:

- (a) We shall be aware of his activity, talked of naturally in terms of will.
- (b) We shall rightly model our relationship in personal terms, realizing that qualification, however, is necessary.
- (c) We shall therefore be articulate as to a friend, expressing gratitude, hopes, needs, anxieties, wishes, *but without restriction of range.*
- (d) Combining (a), (b), and (c), in an obvious sense, the first and last prayer must be "Thy will be done"—a desire for harmony between God's will and ours which points not to defeat and resignation but to life and self-fulfillment. The "answer" to a prayer may be that we have something to do—prayer continuous with and culminating in action.

3. We can look for some kind of special response from God. For we may rightly expect our prayers to provide that *milieu* in which God's saving activity in Christ can be displayed. In this way, prayer extends the Incarnation of God, which has thus an important doctrinal cross-reference reminding us that in and by prayer we become more effective and faithful members of the Body of Christ, the church in which God is active—indeed, which exists by and through the activity of God. There are certain principles by which we must be guided when we are preparing this milieu:

- (a) Our language must specify possibilities which, as far as we know, are "open."

- (b) All the language we use must be consistent with our theological map and our map of the universe, which means that the dominant motif of a prayer will be love.
- (c) We must have some idea of what we are asking God to do; *but* our prayers must not be determined by our supposed knowledge or ignorance of God's cosmological machinery, and details of his working.
- (d) At the same time, we can legitimately believe in principle that God can act within the open texture of the universe.
- (e) If what we pray for does not happen, we have not correctly construed God's activity; if it does, then we rightly regard it as a "miracle"—discerning the active concern of God in and around a certain pattern of events.
- (f) Our understanding of prayer can benefit from acknowledging the deep relations that exist between human beings. But let us not give by implication a reductionist account of prayer.

4. Prayer, being an orientation of ourselves in God's presence, an offering of ourselves to the loving and saving activity disclosed in Christ, in an endeavor to renew and restore the world and humanity, is thus a microcosm of Christian life and action, and the deepest spirituality becomes the most active participation.