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Prayer and the Holy Spirit.

THE direct references in the New Testament to the place of the Holy Spirit in prayer are few, but we are not justified in assuming on that account that the subject had no central significance for the Primitive Church and has none for us. We have no reason to suppose that what was explicitly taught only here and there failed of general recognition. We may fairly claim that a community that in all respects revealed its dependence upon the power of the Spirit would not miss the significance of the Spirit in the life of prayer. It may well have been the case that little needed to be said because the matter was taken for granted as an obvious first principle. There are two references to "praying in the (Holy) Spirit" (Ephesians vi. 18; Jude 20), but it is only in a brief passage in the Epistle to the Romans that the phrase finds doctrinal exposition and interpretation. "And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit Himself 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" (viii. 26f). The aim of the Apostle is to encourage his readers as they are overwhelmed by the thought of the grand Divine purpose he has been setting forth. They may well be conscious of infirmity as they seek to give form and substance to their inarticulate longings and aspirations. But they are assured that the Spirit Himself interprets their formless prayers and presents them as Intercessor before God. The God Who moves them to prayer by the revelation of His will also renders it effective and fruitful by the intercession of the Spirit.

The doctrine provides the basis for a Christian theology of prayer of the utmost practical value. Without it the life of prayer may easily seem a weary and discouraging striving, uninspired and uninspiring. It may appear more arduous than it really is, because it has no wings on which to rise. Without the assurance of the Spirit's help it may be, if not abandoned, allowed at any rate to become fitful and perfunctory. When we are least able to summon our energies for prayer is often the occasion when prayer is most desperately needed, and we are indeed in sorry case if there does not come to us the blessed illumination of the Spirit's ministry of intercession, by which we are led to see that prayer is not merely a human activity but one in which both God and man co-operate.

It does no violence to the Apostle's sense of our dependence upon the Spirit in prayer, but rather brings out the full range of his teaching, to say that what he really means is that we pray most truly when it is the Spirit who prays in us. If true prayer is due to the Divine initiative and if of ourselves we do not know how to pray aright, it is much better described as a Divine activity in which God invites our co-operation than as a human activity in which we invoke the help of God. Certainly, to interpret the Spirit's intercession as the Spirit praying in us best illuminates the meaning of prayer and most satisfactorily solves the problems and difficulties associated with it. If we approach the subject of prayer from the human angle we are not far from a magical interpretation, for it is easy to conclude that it is no more than a human means of securing Divine favour, as though God were instrumental to our purposes. But if we regard it as a Divine activity we recognise that we must set our desires in harmonious relation to the Divine will, and that we can pray with confidence, because prayer being a mode of the Divine working cannot fail in some real measure to further in the world the ends of God. Those who pray in dependence on the Spirit as their Helper will not be of those who ask and receive not, because they ask amiss.

It is in respect of petition and intercession that the higher, because more spiritual, view of prayer is most illuminating and suggestive. Petitionary prayer, though it is an immemorial practice of the religious spirit, has fallen into some disrepute in modern times, but the Pauline doctrine provides us with a reasonable theology that may be claimed genuinely to rehabilitate it. The pressure from the side of the natural sciences has been admittedly heavy, but it does not altogether excuse the failure so to conceive the spiritual order that prayer may not be regarded as a law of the Divine activity within it. There seems to have been far more deference to the scientists and philosophers than to the saints, with a corresponding lack of confidence in the testimony of religious experience. Of course, if prayer is simply a human operation, we may well deem it a presumptuous and childish attempt to challenge the well-established uniformities of an ordered Universe, although even then it is more than likely that we are interpreting the laws of Nature in far too rigid and mechanical a fashion. But if we conceive prayer to be primarily a Divine activity, we may be led to see that it also is to be counted among those uniformities which exhibit the ways of God's customary working. We may then be able to construct a positive theology of prayer which no longer reduces petition to auto-suggestion and regards intercession as having no other purpose than that of inflaming our zeal in good works. Recent

theology, happily, has assumed a bolder and less apologetic attitude, as witness Professor Farmer's notable vindication of petitionary prayer in his recent work, *The World and God*. This treatment does not offer a theology of prayer in terms of the Spirit, but it prepares the way for it by removing the preliminary difficulties.

The central problem of intercession lies in the fact that it assumes that other people may be influenced indirectly through prayer. The same problem arises in petition, when the answers to our prayers involve the necessary action of others. The problem is not whether God exercises influence upon the souls of men in response to prayer, but *how* He does so. To the simple believer who is content to carry out his religious practices in simple faith, this may seem no more than an academical question; enough for him that God is the Hearer and Answerer of prayer. But the issue is really of practical importance, for no sooner do we begin to reflect on the various conceptions of God's working in prayer than we discover that many of our difficulties and discouragements are due to inadequate conceptions of the "how" of prayer. Three solutions to our problem call for examination.

1. *We may conceive God as acting directly on others in response to our petitions.* This is to regard prayer as primarily a human activity, where God's doing depends and follows upon our asking. Apart from the possibility of this view leading to the thought of God being in our service and at our disposal, it is open to the criticism that it does not give sufficient justification for prayer. If God as our Father reads all our hearts and knows all our need and if we are persuaded that His attitude towards us is wholly gracious, mere asking seems superfluous. If in prayer we do no more than tell God what He already knows, there is no sufficient motive for regarding it as our highest service and for taking pains to persevere in its mastery. We are confronted here with a common difficulty which many entertain, and there is no way of overcoming it save by realising that prayer is itself a creative principle, whereby in the Divine economy God employs desire and aspiration to further His purposes. Certainly, when we study the testimony of the great masters in the art of prayer, we are impressed by nothing so much as their conviction that prayer is the highest function of the soul, because it is the highest form of co-operation with God. When Elizabeth Leseur describes prayer as "that high and fruitful form of action" which "works with God for souls," it does not need the perusal of her entire *Journal* to recognise that she means by prayer something far more than simple asking.

2. *The second solution presses into service the idea of telepathy or thought-transference.* It has at least this merit, that

it seeks to deal with the difficulty of the first solution. If mind may influence mind at a distance and without sensuous communication, it is conceivable that prayer is a special case of some such principle. If that is so, then prayer has a creative function of its own and is more than mere supplication. But so far decisive evidence in favour of telepathy is lacking, and we have no sufficient warrant for regarding it as other than speculative theory, in spite of its having the support of some competent psychologists. In any case, it does not give us the explanation for which we are looking, although it may provide us with a suggestive analogy. Prayer is not a means of communication between man and man, but an appeal to God on behalf of man. Thought-transference (if there be such a thing) may work without any necessary reference to God and may achieve results contrary to the Divine purpose. If it has any part in the machinery of prayer, it is only as a mechanism employed in a higher order of spiritual system. But even this is doubtful, for it is generally conceived to achieve its results on a level below consciousness, and is therefore sub-personal in its working.

3. *The third solution, which relates prayer to the Holy Spirit, is the only satisfactory one*, since it alone offers a theology of prayer that both puts God at the centre and makes prayer a creative principle in the complex network of human life. Through God prayer is inspired, and through the work of the Spirit as Intercessor it is rendered effective and fruitful. The fundamental requirement in any adequate doctrine of prayer is the discovery of a principle of relationship, whereby man is linked to God and man to man in God, and it is just this principle that the idea of the Spirit provides. He is, so to speak, the common factor in the prayer relationship. On the one hand, He represents men before the throne of grace, pleading for them by interpreting their prayers; on the other hand, He mediates between man and man, interpreting human spirits to one another, not as a mechanical telepathic principle, but as God's personal Agent. The Spirit indwells all men, and it is through Him that they are spiritually related to one another. And prayer is just the instrument which the Spirit employs to accomplish the Divine will and purpose in the web of human life. It is His instrument, not ours, which we use rightly only as we regard it as a Divine activity in which it is our privilege to co-operate. When prayer is inspired by the Spirit, Who reveals to us what we are to pray for and how to pray, it is taken up by Him to become part of His gracious ministry to the souls of men. Answers to prayer are His work, and they are sure because He ministers according to the will of God. Our prayers are then no utterances sent forth into the void, but the very means whereby

God carries out the providential government of the Universe. Human desire, purified and sanctified by the Spirit, becomes a way of the Divine working. On this view, prayer cannot be regarded as mere superfluous request, but must be seen as a sharing and co-operation in God's loving service to His children. Such a view of prayer confers upon us a sense of privilege that at once humbles and exalts us, for it reveals to us, unworthy as we are, how great is our high calling as God's servants in the world.

The idea of the inter-relation of human spirits in and through the Spirit is of supreme importance if we are to understand rightly the operation of prayer. Modern psychology has taught us to abandon all rigid individualism and to recognise that the group is not simply the sum of its parts, but an organism of inter-dependent members. This has a far-reaching significance for religion, and for prayer in particular. "I wonder whether you realise," wrote Baron von Hügel to a correspondent, "a deep, great fact? That souls—all human souls—are deeply inter-connected? That (I mean) we can, not only pray for each other, but suffer for each other? . . . Nothing is more real than this inter-connection—this gracious power put by God Himself into the very heart of our infirmities." However the psychologists may explain this "deep, great fact," the ultimate explanation is to be found only in the doctrine of the Indwelling Spirit. The great witness to it is the Church, in which the Spirit works at a higher level because all who are united in the Christian society have deliberately submitted themselves to the Spirit's working. As the Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided fellowship of believers the Church is thus the concrete symbol of the wider range of the Spirit's operations through the entire course and range of human life. Partial and imperfect as is the Church's representation of the Spirit's working, it is yet our best picture of the ministry of the Spirit to humanity at large. To that ministry, prayer is a necessary instrument, whereby under the Spirit's control and direction contact is established and communication effected between spirit and spirit. When we are willing to pray in the Spirit or, better, let the Spirit pray in us, we are permitted to share in a spiritual influence whose range and power transcends our knowledge. Our petitions and intercessions go forth to the uttermost ends of the earth and, perhaps, beyond, to further the redeeming purpose of God in ways that none but He can know. Christians, therefore, because they are members of the one body in Christ and also members of the one humanity, have no higher function than petitionary prayer. Prayer is for them, if they understand it aright, the highest form of spiritual service, not only because there is much that cannot be accomplished without

it, but also because it is the only sure means to right action. For when we are summoned to action under the constraint of the Spirit, it is only that we ourselves may provide the answer to prayer, whether the prayer be ours or another's, or whether it be on our own behalf or on that of others.

The distinction which has been drawn between the Church and humanity without as two social organisms with their centre in the Spirit, but at different levels of realisation and effectiveness, reminds us that prayer is a corporate as well as an individual exercise. The priesthood of prayer is committed to the Church as a community, and not merely to the individual members. In so far as the Spirit has free course in the Body of Christ, the Church will exercise itself in the fellowship of prayer. The power of prayer is enhanced when it is a corporate act, for fellowship expands the individual capacity, and the wider the circle the more numerous the media of the Spirit's activity. No function of the Church is more characteristic than that of prayer, and when for it the Church substitutes other forms of activity as its principal business it soon begins to manifest an unmistakable weakness. Worship is not only adoration and thanksgiving, it is also prayer in the primary sense of the word, petition and intercession. Whatever may be the measure of the Spirit's impact upon humanity other than by the agency of the Church, we may be sure that it is chiefly through the praying community that God does His work in the world, for it is ever the Divine method to help and serve men through men. We may therefore think of the Church as the Divine society within the larger organism of the world, called into being and maintained in order to reconcile the world to God and to transform it into the fashion of His Kingdom. But the Church fulfils its task only as prayer is its life-breath, its supreme means of co-operation with God. Only when it is right in its understanding and practice of prayer, does it become a royal priesthood, offering to God all else as in the Spirit it offers the sacrifices of prayer.

So far we have considered prayer solely as a personal activity, as action by persons upon persons through the intercession of the Spirit. But there are objects of prayer which appear to have no personal reference, such as favourable weather to ensure a good harvest. Here it would seem that prayer cannot be a creative principle and must be simply bare supplication. But the truth surely is that the Spirit Who indwells the hearts of men is also immanent in the world of things. We are too apt to conceive Nature after a mechanical fashion, as though it were a huge machine controlled from without by God as Chief Engineer. Present-day science suggests that a much truer analogy is that furnished by the relation of body and soul,

according to which Nature is a vast organism animated and controlled by the Spirit of God. Such a conception enables us to conceive how prayer may be taken up by the Spirit and employed by Him in His administration of the world of things, just as He uses prayer in the realm of personal activity. Nor need we suppose it improbable that there are personal intermediaries other than human beings even in the realm of things, for there are highly intelligent moderns who see reason to believe in the ministry of angels. But however that may be, it is reasonable to suppose that the Spirit whom we recognise to dwell in us indwells also the world of Nature, for unless this is so we cannot bring the Universe of men and things into a single unity. To realise this is to know that prayer is a creative principle that operates through the entire range of the cosmos, whereby through His Spirit God seeks to bring all things into subjection to His eternal purpose.

The doctrine of the Spirit is thus seen to afford the proper key to the mysteries of prayer. It furnishes a principle of interconnection, whereby the world of men and things finds its unity in the Spirit. Many of our difficulties in prayer arise from our tendency to think of God "as a kind of super-intelligent benevolent 'third party'," to employ a phrase of the late Canon Streeter in his book *Reality*, over against the praying subject and the object of prayer. But the doctrine of the Spirit enables us to realize that the God Who is above us is not other than the God Who indwells the Universe of men and things. If we begin at this point we can understand that true prayer is prayer in the Spirit, whereby the Spirit prays in us. This makes prayer creative, the most worth-while activity of the human soul, the highest form of spiritual service. Such prayer cannot be casual and perfunctory, for it calls for the offering of ourselves in selfless sacrifice and in earnest and intense desire. It will rise to importunity and suffering in the measure in which the soul enters into and shares the passion of the Divine travail for the world's redemption. Because they have never learnt the true meaning of prayer, or having learnt it are too indolent to practise it, many believers are sadly impoverished in life and unfruitful in service, and have become a serious source of weakness in the Church and of delay in the coming of the Kingdom. It may be too much to hope that all the faithful will ever undertake the full privilege of the priesthood of prayer, but we may and ought to pray that the number of those who have heard and responded to the call of the Spirit may be increased. There has never at any time been lacking a righteous remnant who have gladly offered themselves to be used in the ministry of the Spirit's intercession. Our own day has such saints, and they are the true pillars of

the Church, upholding it by their prayers and proving themselves the very salt of the earth. But their company needs to be increased, that the Holy Spirit of prayer, the Intercessor, may have freer course in furthering amongst men God's purpose of establishing His Kingdom.

W. E. HOUGH.

Heredity.

IT is a matter of common observation that children are both like and sometimes surprisingly unlike their parents. Their likeness in feature, habit, illnesses, temperament and so forth, we loosely call heredity. Their unlikenesses occasion comment, "Wherever does he get it?" We assume that particular trait has got into his character or physique in some other way.

In point of fact, however, unlikenesses as well as likenesses are inherited, if by "inherited" we understand "received from parents by way of the germ cells". There is much that is still profoundly mysterious. All origins go out in mystery. Nevertheless certain biological discoveries have recently been made that throw light on the subject, and open up possibilities of further knowledge of the greatest interest and importance.

The experiments of the Austrian Abbé, Mendel, with peas are pretty well known; and the law that he formulated, called after him "The Mendelian Law". He found that if peas with certain characteristics were crossed, the peas subsequently obtained reproduced these characteristics according to a certain regular proportion. If, for example, tall peas were crossed with dwarfs, the first generation were all tall, but the second generation were tall and dwarf in the proportion of three to one. The former characteristic, therefore, he called "dominant", the latter "recessive". It was found on further experiments that the same rule applied apparently to other plants besides peas, and to the animal world as well. It was presumed it would apply to human beings: But the possibility of experimental cross-breeding not being open, the matter could not be verified. The Mendelian law of heredity came, therefore, to be accepted; but it was not explained.

During the last thirty-five years, however, a great deal of experimental microscopic work has been done by hundreds of biologists, and the explanation now seems to be established