

Paper 91 — The Evolution of Prayer

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This chart is a revision of the August 20, 2010 version and December 20, 2011 versions. Most endnotes and Urantia Book cross-references have been deleted to enhance readability.

Sources for Paper 91, in the order in which they first appear

- (1) William Kelley **Wright**, *A Student's Philosophy of Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922, 1935)
- (2) Henry Nelson **Wieman** and Regina Westcott-Wieman, *Normative Psychology of Religion* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1935)

Note: Henry Nelson Wieman authored the chapter used in this paper.

Key

- (a) **Green** indicates where a source author first appears, or where he/she reappears.
- (b) **Yellow** highlights most parallelisms.
- (c) **Tan** highlights parallelisms not occurring on the same row, or parallelisms separated by yellowed parallelisms.
- (d) An underlined word or words indicates where the source and the UB writer pointedly differ from each other.
- (e) **Blue** indicates original (or “revealed”) information, or UB-specific terminology and concepts. (What to highlight in this regard is debatable; the highlights are tentative.)

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PAPER 91 — THE EVOLUTION OF PRAYER

91:0.1 Prayer, as an agency of religion, evolved from previous nonreligious monologue and dialogue expressions. With the attainment of self-consciousness by primitive man there occurred the inevitable corollary of other-consciousness, the dual potential of social response and God recognition.

91:0.2 The earliest prayer forms were not addressed to Deity. These expressions were much like what you would say to a friend as you entered upon some important undertaking, “Wish me luck.” Primitive man was enslaved to magic; luck, good and bad, entered into all the affairs of life. At first, these luck petitions were monologues—just a kind of thinking out loud by the magic server. Next, these believers in luck would enlist the support of their friends and families, and presently some form of ceremony would be performed which included the whole clan or tribe.

91:0.3 When the concepts of ghosts and spirits evolved, these petitions became superhuman in address, and with the consciousness of gods, such expressions attained to the levels of genuine prayer.

XVI: PRAYER (Wright 257)

VII—*The Objectivity of Prayer* (Wright 277)

If we recall what was said regarding the evolution of prayer in Chapter VI., it will be remembered that among primitive peoples sacrifice and prayer probably antedate beliefs in spirits, gods and other personal beings of all sorts (Wr 278).

III: THE DIFFERENTIATION OF RELIGION (Wright 18)

II—*The Todas* (Wright 18)

The Todas live in the Nilgiri Hills, in Southern India, upon a high plateau which is comparatively isolated....

The Toda prayers, it will be observed, are quite remarkable in one respect. They are not addressed to any superior beings (Wr 19-20).

It may be that the Toda prayers are in a state of degeneration, and that formerly gods were invoked, or it may be that they are undeveloped, primordial prayers that have not yet arrived at the stage at which the invocation of a personal agency would naturally occur to them (Wr 21).

III—*Lessons from the Toda Religion* (Wright 23)

As an illustration of this,

among certain Australian tribes¹ primitive religious prayers antedated their belief in spirits and superhuman personalities.

91:0.4 The Toda tribe of India now observes this practice of praying to no one in particular,

just as did the early peoples before the times of religious consciousness.

Only, among the Todas, this represents a regression of their degenerating religion to this primitive level.

The present-day rituals of the dairymen priests of the Todas do not represent a religious ceremony since these impersonal prayers

The real, vital religion of the Todas to-day, the dairy ritual, is an attempt to conserve their most important values. It actually does this in part, though not as the Todas imagine (Wr 23).

do not contribute anything to the conservation or enhancement of any social, moral, or spiritual values.

IV—*The Melanesians. Mana.* (Wright 24)

91:0.5 Prereligious praying was part of

Of the **Melanesians**, Bishop Codrington says, “... All Melanesian religion consists, in fact, in getting this *mana* for one’s self, or getting it used for one’s benefit—all religion, that is, as far as religious practices go, prayers and sacrifices” (Wr 26).

the **mana** practices of the **Melanesians**,

The **Pygmies in Africa** have a similar notion of *oudah*.

the **oudah** beliefs of the **African Pygmies**,

Among **North American Indian** tribes there are words with similar purport. The Algonkin term is *manitou* (Wr 27).

and the **manitou** superstitions of the **North American Indians**.

IV: RELIGION DIFFERENTIATED (Wright 31)

I—*The Baganda* (Wright 31)

[contd] As representative of savage religion after it has become a fully differentiated human interest with specialized institutions, we may properly select the **Baganda** for study. This central **African tribe**, situated in Uganda, just west of Lake Victoria Nyanza, directly upon the Equator, possesses all the different forms of savage religious worship (Wr 31).

The **Baganda tribes of Africa** have only recently emerged from the mana level of prayer.

In this early evolutionary confusion men pray to

The objects of Baganda religious worship belong to four classes: (1) gods, national and local;

(2) fetiches; (3) amulets;

(4) ghosts, of kings and of ordinary people (Wr 31).

gods—local and national—

to fetishes, amulets,

ghosts, rulers, and to ordinary people.

1. PRIMITIVE PRAYER

V: DEFINITION OF RELIGION.
RELATION OF RELIGION TO OTHER
HUMAN ACTIVITIES (Wright 41)

II—*Genus of the Definition* (Wright 41)

[contd] A logical definition begins by stating some genus or larger class to which the term defined belongs. The genus of which religion is an instance is that of *endeavor to secure the conservation of socially recognized values* (Wr 41).

91:1.1 The function of early evolutionary religion is to conserve and augment the essential social, moral, and spiritual values

which are slowly taking form.

[Compare Wr 24.]

This mission of religion is not consciously observed by mankind, but it is chiefly effected by the function of prayer. The practice of prayer represents the unintended, but nonetheless personal and collective, effort of any group to secure (to actualize) this conservation of higher values.²

VIII—*Religion and Art. Play* (Wright 55)

[contd from 91:2.7] Religious workers in different ages have realized [that many persons attend religious ceremonies impelled by the desire to have a good time] and have made religious rites appeal to a variety of interests. They have often been willing that a **holy day** should in some measure be a **holiday** (Wr 57).

II—*Genus of the Definition* (Wright 41)

One characteristic applies to all the values of both natural and ethical religion. The values are all **“socially recognized”** (Wr 42).

But if a man’s private vengeance would be inimical to the public welfare, if it would promote feuds and dissensions where united action is necessary, he would not be seeking socially recognized values.

He could not seek the aid of religion, and would have to go to **sorcerers** and other shady folk for supernatural assistance in carrying out his **anti-social** act (Wr 42).

But for the safeguarding of prayer,

all **holy days** would speedily revert to the status of mere **holidays**.

91:1.2 Religion and its agencies, the chief of which is prayer, are allied only with

those values which have general **social recognition**, group approval.

Therefore, when primitive man attempted to gratify his baser emotions or to achieve unmitigated selfish ambitions, he was deprived of the consolation of religion and the assistance of prayer.

If the individual sought to accomplish anything **antisocial**,

he was obliged to seek the aid of non-religious magic, resort to **sorcerers**,

and thus be deprived of the assistance of prayer.

Prayer, therefore, very early became a mighty promoter of social evolution, moral progress, and spiritual attainment.

[Contrast 86:2.3, 90:3.3; see Wr 12, 25.]

91:1.3 But the primitive mind was neither logical nor consistent.

Early men did not perceive that material things were not the province of prayer. These simple-minded souls reasoned that

Religion is an “endeavor to secure the *conservation* of socially recognized values.” “*Conservation*” is intended in a wide sense of the world. It includes *quantitative increase* of the object that is of value, in the case of **food, rain, and other material goods** (Wr 43).

food, shelter, rain, game, and other material goods enhanced the social welfare,

and therefore they began to pray for these physical blessings.

[Compare Wr 16-17.]

While this constituted a perversion of prayer, it encouraged the effort to realize these material objectives by social and ethical actions. Such a prostitution of prayer, while debasing the spiritual values of a people, nevertheless directly elevated their economic, social, and ethical mores.

91:1.4 Prayer is only monologous in the most primitive type of mind. It early becomes a dialogue and rapidly expands to the level of group worship.

III—*The Differentia* (Wright 44)

Prayer signifies that the premagical incantations of primitive religion have evolved to that level where the human mind recognizes the reality of

The definition as a whole, including both genus and differentia, is therefore this:—
Religion is the endeavor to secure the conservation of socially recognized values through specific actions that are believed to evoke some agency

different from the ordinary ego of the individual, or from other merely human beings, and that imply a feeling of dependence upon the agency (Wr 47).

V—*Religion and Animism* (Wright 48)

The universal characteristic of religion, as we have seen, is the belief in a peculiar sort of agency that can be utilized to conserve values. This agency may or may not be referred to a personal source. If it is referred to a personal source, we shall find **animism** associated with religion. If spirits or ghosts are thought to possess *mana* it will be natural for man to seek to get on good terms with them so that they will impart *mana* to him (Wr 49-50).

Likewise **animistic beliefs may exist** in a tribe quite apart from its religion, or they may be features of the religion (Wr 50).

The origin of animistic beliefs needs not greatly to concern us here. **Religion and animism have had independent origins** (Wr 50).

beneficent powers or beings who are able to enhance social values and to augment moral ideals,

and further, that these influences are superhuman and **distinct from the ego of the self-conscious human** and his fellow mortals.

True prayer does not, therefore, appear until the agency of religious ministry is visualized as *personal*.

91:1.5 Prayer is little associated with **animism**,

but **such beliefs may exist** alongside emerging religious sentiments.

Many times, **religion and animism have had entirely separate origins**.

XVI: PRAYER (Wright 257)

III—*Merits and Limitations of Each Type of Prayer* (Wright 262)

Perhaps the chief danger in the ethical prayer is to be found in the development of a morbid sense of sin.

To recognize one's faults, repent of them, and make an honest attempt to overcome them, is a healthful effect of ethical prayer. But to brood over real or fancied wrong doing to the point of sickness of mind and body is hurtful.

In these days of activity, however, there are probably more persons who do not take time enough for ethical prayer to know their sins than there are who spend so much time grieving over them that they become morbid (Wr 263).

If private prayer were to be used by anyone to the exclusion of community prayer there would be grave danger that the Alter of such an individual would be narrow and unsymmetrical. Into his conception of God would be projected the narrow prejudices and bigotry of the man himself. Prayer to God, so conceived, might intensify hatred and fanaticism (Wr 263).

91:1.6 With those mortals who have not been delivered from the primitive bondage of fear,

there is a real danger that all prayer may lead to a morbid sense of sin, unjustified convictions of guilt,

real or fancied.

But in modern times it is not likely that many will spend sufficient time at prayer to lead to this harmful brooding over their unworthiness or sinfulness.

The dangers attendant upon the distortion and perversion of prayer consist in ignorance, superstition, crystallization, devitalization, materialism,

and fanaticism.

2. EVOLVING PRAYER

[Compare 87:6.2, 88:4.1.]

91:2.1 The first prayers were merely verbalized wishes, the expression of sincere desires. Prayer next became a technique of achieving spirit cooperation. And then it attained to the higher function of assisting religion in the conservation of all worth-while values.

[See Wieman 139-40; compare with 91:8.2, below.]

91:2.2 Both prayer and magic arose as a result of man's adjustive reactions to **Urantian** environment. But aside from this generalized relationship, they have little in common. Prayer has always indicated positive action by the praying ego; it has been always psychic and sometimes spiritual. Magic has usually signified an attempt to manipulate reality without affecting the ego of the manipulator, the practitioner of magic. Despite their independent origins, magic and prayer often have been interrelated in their later stages of development. Magic has sometimes ascended by goal elevation from formulas through rituals and incantations to the threshold of true prayer. Prayer has sometimes become so materialistic that it has degenerated into a pseudomagical technique of avoiding the expenditure of that effort which is requisite for the solution of **Urantian** problems.

[One can observe many activities going by the name of prayer which lack the moral and religious character. They are really attempts at incantation, exorcism and magic, although the individual may never recognize them as such (**Wieman** 130-31).]

VI: THE EVOLUTION OF DEITIES, SACRIFICE AND PRAYER (Wright 58)

IV—*The Evolution of Prayer* (Wright 66)

Man learned to realize that spirits and gods must be greater and mightier than he, and that they do not need his aid and cannot be **coerced** by him.

91:2.3 When **man learned** that prayer could not **coerce** the gods,

Prayers now become either *petitions requesting favors* for man which the god on account of his superior power is able to grant if he is so disposed,

or else they have for their aim *communion* with the divinity, in which case man seeks a larger, fuller life by identifying himself somehow with the divine (Wr 67).

III—*The Evolution of Sacrifice* (Wright 64)

IV—*The Evolution of Prayer* (Wright 66)

Dr. Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) describes how the Sioux boy solemnly and with due ceremonial retires in solitude to the mountains in expectation of some vision of the “great mystery” (manitou). This clearly points in the direction of a prayer of *communion*, though the “Great Mystery” does not seem to be clearly personified and not more than half become a God (Wr 67-68).

then it became more of a *petition, favor seeking*.

But the truest prayer is in reality

a *communion* between man and his Maker.

91:2.4 The appearance of the *sacrifice* idea in any religion unfailingly detracts from the higher efficacy of true prayer in that men seek to substitute the offerings of material possessions for the offering of their own consecrated wills to the doing of the will of God.

91:2.5 When religion is divested of a personal God, its prayers translate to the levels of theology and philosophy. When the highest God concept of a religion is that of an impersonal Deity, such as in pantheistic idealism, although affording the basis for

certain forms of mystic *communion*,

it proves fatal to the potency of true prayer, which always stands for man's communion with a personal and superior being.

V: DEFINITION OF RELIGION.
RELATION OF RELIGION TO OTHER
HUMAN ACTIVITIES (Wright 41)

III—*The Differentia* (Wright 44)

Professor Leuba's investigations reveal the interesting fact that there are educated Americans to-day with very deep religious feelings who pray and know that they feel spiritual reinforcement, in consequence, and yet are not at all sure that this is not due wholly to the influx of energy from the sub-conscious mental and physical resources of their own organisms (Wr 44-45).

91:2.6 During the earlier times of racial evolution and even at the present time, in the day-by-day experience of the average mortal, prayer is very much a phenomenon of man's intercourse with

his own subconscious.

But there is also a domain of prayer wherein the intellectually alert and spiritually progressing individual attains more or less contact with the super-conscious levels of the human mind, the domain of the indwelling Thought Adjuster. In addition, there is a definite spiritual phase of true prayer which concerns its reception and recognition by the spiritual forces of the universe, and which is entirely distinct from all human and intellectual association.

VIII—*Religion and Art. Play* (Wright 55)

It must be admitted that religious ceremonies both among savages and civilized nations, are often joyous festivals in which sociability is enhanced. It follows that many persons attend them impelled by the desire to have a good time, as well as by impulses of curiosity and gregariousness. In persons whose attendance is at first due to these impulses, a genuine religious sentiment may ultimately develop (Wr 57).

IV—*Comparative Religion* (Wright 47)

Each religion [both natural and ethical] has its *threefold technique*:—(a) its *ritual* including sacrifices and prayers;

(b) its myths and its dogmas and other *intellectual explanations* why this ritual is necessary and how it works; (c) its own *institutional organisation* for carrying on its ritual, teaching its intellectual formulations and for handing both down to the next generation (Wr 48).

91:2.7 Prayer contributes greatly to the development of the religious sentiment of an evolving human mind.

It is a mighty influence working to prevent isolation of personality.

91:2.8 Prayer represents one technique associated with the natural religions of racial evolution which also forms a part of the experiential values of the higher religions of ethical excellence, the religions of revelation.

3. PRAYER AND THE ALTER EGO

XVI: PRAYER (Wright 257)

I—*The Conversational Nature of Thought and Prayer* (Wright 257)

Since language is heard by the infant in the conversation of others before he is able to speak himself, and since his first use of speech is in conversation with others, it follows as a natural consequence that his private thinking also very often assumes a conversational form. Sometimes, as he plays, he unconsciously **thinks aloud,**

and others hear what he says.

Such conversational thinking may all be addressed to an **imaginary alter**

who **makes appropriate replies,**

so that the child carries on a complete **dialogue,** or it may assume a simpler **monologue** form (Wr 257).

[contd] **Adults similarly carry on much of their private thought in conversational form** (Wr 257).

91:3.1 Children, when first learning to make use of language, are prone to **think out loud,** to express their thoughts in words,

even if **no one** is present to hear them.

With the dawn of creative imagination they evince a tendency to

converse with **imaginary** companions.

In this way a budding ego seeks to hold communion with a fictitious **alter ego.**

By this technique the child early learns to convert his **monologue** conversations into pseudo **dialogues**

in which this alter ego **makes replies** to his verbal thinking and wish expression.

Very much of an adult's thinking is mentally carried on in conversational form.

SOURCE OR PARALLEL

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The simplest prayers, not greatly different in principle from magical spells, such as those of the Toda dairyman priests, referred to in Chapter III, are of this type,

not being addressed to any one (Wr 257).

Prayer, as practised in most religions assumes the dialogue form.

The individual who prays identifies himself with the ego, and addresses his prayers to an alter, whom he believes to be superior to himself in power, and thus able to effect what he could not accomplish alone.

The alter in the primitive religion might be a fetich, a spirit or a ghost, or one of the gods.

In the spiritual religions the Alter is God,—

a Being who embodies the highest and loftiest aspirations of the ego (Wr 258).

91:3.2 The early and primitive form of prayer was much like the semimagical recitations of the present-day Toda tribe,

prayers that were not addressed to anyone in particular.

But such techniques of praying tend to evolve into the dialogue type of communication

by the emergence of the idea of an alter ego.

In time the alter-ego concept is exalted to a superior status of divine dignity,

and prayer as an agency of religion has appeared.

Through many phases and during long ages this primitive type of praying is destined to evolve before attaining the level of intelligent and truly ethical prayer.

91:3.3 As it is conceived by successive generations of praying mortals,

the alter ego evolves up through ghosts, fetishes, and spirits to polytheistic gods,

and eventually to the One God,

a divine being embodying the highest ideals and the loftiest aspirations of the praying ego.

And thus does prayer function as the most potent agency of religion in the conservation of the highest values and ideals of those who pray. From the moment of the conceiving of an alter ego to the appearance of the concept of a divine and heavenly Father, prayer is always a socializing, moralizing, and spiritualizing practice.

91:3.4 The simple prayer of faith evidences a mighty evolution in human experience whereby the ancient conversations with the fictitious symbol of the alter ego of primitive religion have become exalted to the level of communion with the spirit of the Infinite and to that of a bona fide consciousness of the reality of the eternal God and Paradise Father of all intelligent creation.

VII—*The Objectivity of Prayer* (Wright 277)

91:3.5 Aside from all that is superself in the experience of praying, it should be remembered that ethical prayer is a splendid way to

In any event it is evident that the **reinforcement** of the conscious **Ego** of dialogue prayer is effected through the agency of the Alter,

elevate one's **ego** and **reinforce** the self for better living and higher attainment.

Prayer induces the human ego to look both ways for help:

and it also is evident that the Alter is the key by which **sub-conscious reserves** of energy are tapped.

for material aid to the **subconscious reservoir** of mortal experience,

for inspiration and guidance to the super-conscious borders of the contact of the material with the spiritual, with the Mystery Monitor.

91:3.6 Prayer ever has been and ever will be a twofold human experience: a psychologic procedure **interassociated with a spiritual technique**. And these two functions of prayer can never be fully separated.

91:3.7 Enlightened prayer must recognize not only

But it is not necessary to conclude that this energy has all been produced within the organism. Some of it may enter the organism from outside when the individual prays.... This theory will in the remainder of this book be referred to as the hypothesis of an **external God**, *i.e., a God external to the mind and body of the individual person, who acts upon the person through his subconsciousness* (Wr 280-81).

It seems to the author that another possibility remains.... This is *the hypothesis of an immanent God, i.e. of a God present in everything in Nature, so that all natural processes are His actions....* On this theory, to say that prayer is wholly an affair of the organism, interpreted scientifically, is not to deny that it is the action of God, but to affirm it (Wr 282-83).

an **external** and personal **God**

but also an **internal** and impersonal Divinity,

the **indwelling Adjuster**.

It is altogether fitting that man, when he prays, should strive to grasp the concept of the **Universal Father on Paradise**; but the more effective technique for most practical purposes will be to revert to the concept of a near-by alter ego, just as the primitive mind was wont to do, and then to recognize that the idea of this alter ego has evolved from

In prayer, an Alter is present in [one's] consciousness that symbolizes God for him as clearly and definitely as is possible for a person of his intelligence and experience. Such an Alter, he believes, is not a mere fiction of his imagination,

but a symbol of a Being that actually exists (Wr 283).

VI—*The Efficacy of Prayer* (Wright 269)

Prayer is efficacious, never as a substitute for action,

but as a guide and stimulus to action (Wr 275).

a mere fiction

to the truth of God's indwelling mortal man in the factual presence of the Adjuster

so that man can talk face to face, as it were, with a real and genuine and divine alter ego that indwells him and is the very presence and essence of the living God, the Universal Father.

4. ETHICAL PRAYING

91:4.1 No prayer can be ethical when the petitioner seeks for selfish advantage over his fellows. Selfish and materialistic praying is incompatible with the ethical religions which are predicated on unselfish and divine love. All such unethical praying reverts to the primitive levels of pseudo magic and is unworthy of advancing civilizations and enlightened religions. Selfish praying transgresses the spirit of all ethics founded on loving justice.

91:4.2 Prayer must never be so prostituted as to become a substitute for action.

All ethical prayer is a stimulus to action and a guide

to the progressive striving for idealistic goals of superself-attainment.

91:4.3 In all your praying be *fair*;

And how petty and selfish it really would be for a person to ask that the laws of the universe should be set aside for his sake. Could we respect a God who would **show such partiality** to people who prayed for such selfish ends! (Wr 276)

do not expect God to **show partiality**,

to love you more than his other children, your friends, neighbors, even enemies.

But the prayer of the natural or evolved religions is not at first ethical, **as it is in the later revealed religions.**

II—*Types of Prayer* (Wright 260)

Each of these types of prayer, **Individual** and **Community**,

All praying, whether **individual** or **communal**,

may be subdivided into *Aesthetic* and *Egoistic* prayers.

may be either **egoistic** or **altruistic**.

*In the Aesthetic prayer, attention is centered upon the Alter; in the Egoistic prayer, attention is **centered upon the ego.***

That is, the prayer may be **centered upon the self** or upon **others**.³

When the prayer seeks nothing for the one who prays nor anything for his fellows,

In both types the *Alter* is recognized to be superior to the ego in moral worth and in power, and the attitude of the *ego* toward the *Alter* is one of submission, awe, and reverence. But in the *aesthetic* type, attention is centered on the *Alter*, and the prayer assumes the form of *praise* or *communion* (Wr 260).

then such attitudes of the soul tend to the levels of true worship.

The *Egoistic* type of prayer is of course not egotistical, nor is it ordinarily selfish in any bad sense of the word. In it the individual seeks some benefit to himself, and his effort is to disclose his needs to the Alter to whom he looks for aid. Prayers of *petition* and *confession* belong here.

Egoistic prayers may be *Naturalistic* (i.e., those typical of naturalistic religions as described in Part I), in which *material* goods for the Ego are sought;—rain, crops, posterity, long life, victory in war, omens, oracles, etc.;

or they may be *ethical*,

in which some *moral benefit* to the ego is sought,—*forgiveness* of sins, conversion, purity of heart, *wisdom*, *self-control*, strength for the day's work, and the like (Wr 261).

III—*Merits and Limitations of Each Type of Prayer* (Wright 262)

The aesthetic type is calming and *comforting*... The individual gains confidence, as he feels himself supported by power greater than that of his conscious self. God is his refuge, and he feels *strong* and secure in the everlasting arms (Wr 262).

[contd] The *naturalistic type of prayer* in this age of scientific enlightenment, has almost disappeared.

People as a rule know too much of the uniformity of natural *law* to believe it possible that prayer can change the order of natural events (Wr 262).

Egoistic prayers involve *confessions* and *petitions*

and often consist in requests for *material* favors.

Prayer is somewhat more *ethical*

when it deals with *forgiveness* and seeks *wisdom* for enhanced *self-control*.

91:4.4 While the nonselfish type of prayer is *strengthening* and *comforting*,

materialistic praying

is destined to bring disappointment and disillusionment

as advancing scientific discoveries demonstrate that man lives in a physical universe of *law* and order.

V—*Prayer Tends to Become Discriminating*
(Wright 267)

Miss Strong says that some college girls have admitted to her that they have prayed for success in basketball games or in examinations, but have made the admission somewhat shamefacedly. Such prayers undoubtedly would be likely to be efficacious.

Sub-conscious energy would be released, and the person's efficiency would be increased (Wr 267).

“A little child, seeing a storm cloud rising, stops his play, kneels on the lawn, and begs God not to let it rain. This is real prayer; . . . because he assumes toward God a personal relation that is appropriate for a little child. . . . Just so, the simple believer who asks that he may have rain for his wheat-field truly prays.... By bringing his daily occupation to God, the farmer attains to something greater than wheat, however—to a spiritual relationship that is of ultimate worth.”

Saint Teresa is quoted by Miss Strong to similar effect:—“I laugh and grieve at the things people come to ask our prayers for...” Still, to encourage them to come at all, the convent accepts such prayers and offers them, though, she says, “I am persuaded our Lord never heard me in these matters—for persons even request us to ask His Majesty for money and revenues” (Wr 267-68).

The childhood of an individual or a race is characterized by primitive, selfish, and materialistic praying.

And, to a certain extent, all such petitions are efficacious

in that they unvaryingly lead to those efforts and exertions which are contributory to achieving the answers to such prayers.

The real prayer of faith always contributes to the augmentation of the technique of living,

even if such petitions are not worthy of spiritual recognition.

How far the religious credulity of children and uneducated people should be allowed to remain undisturbed is of course a serious question. One does not like to take the responsibility of disturbing their faith, and risk removing the source of strength and comfort and stimulation to higher things that their religion affords them. At the same time there always is the danger that such people, disappointed in finding impossible prayers unanswered will presently lose their faith entirely (Wr 268).

VI—*The Efficacy of Prayer* (Wright 269)

1. The possible effects of prayer upon the mind and body of the **person who prays** are very **great**.

The only apparent conditions are **faith** in the process of prayer itself, and persistence.

Peace of mind, calmness, cheerfulness, wisdom, courage, selfmastery, fair-mindedness in dealing with others, and all other moral virtues are open to him who prays (Wr 269).

But the spiritually advanced person should exercise great caution in attempting to discourage the primitive or immature mind regarding such prayers.

91:4.5 Remember, even if prayer does not change God,

it very often effects **great** and lasting changes in the **one who prays**

in **faith** and confident expectation.

Prayer has been the ancestor of much **peace of mind, cheerfulness, calmness, courage, self-mastery, and fair-mindedness** in the men and women of the evolving races.

5. SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF PRAYER

I—*The Conversational Nature of Thought and Prayer* (Wright 257)

We can readily perceive that **ancestral worship** of this sort as it existed in ancient Greece and still exists in China and Japan, must be a great source of comfort and strength. Through such prayer the worshipper must become more or less like the **ideal of his ancestor** (Wr 259).

When polytheism gives place to monotheism, ... [t]he Alter of prayer then for the first time embodies the very highest ideals of which man is able to conceive. The effect upon him who prays will then be to give him a more coherent, **unified character**, and to inspire him in every way in the highest manner possible (Wr 259).

VI—*The Efficacy of Prayer* (Wright 269)

The discussion thus far has chiefly been regarding the efficacy of **individual prayer**.

The principles stated hold in a similar manner in each case for **community prayer**.

91:5.1 In **ancestor worship**, prayer leads to the cultivation of **ancestral ideals**.

But prayer, as a feature of Deity worship, transcends all other such practices since it leads to the cultivation of divine ideals.

As the concept of the alter ego of prayer becomes supreme and divine, so are man's ideals accordingly elevated from mere human toward supernal and divine levels,

and the result of all such praying is the enhancement of human **character** and the profound **unification** of human personality.

91:5.2 But prayer need not always be **individual**.

Group or congregational praying is very effective in that it is highly socializing in its repercussions.

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If a group of persons were sincerely to pray for mental and moral changes in themselves these would follow almost without limit (Wr 272).

When a group engages in community prayer for moral enhancement and spiritual uplift, such devotions are reactive upon the individuals composing the group;

[This makes undoubtedly for mutual good will, promotes neighborliness and good fellowship, and no doubt as is claimed by the [Australian] natives, “makes every one better” who participates in the ceremonies (Wr 16).]

they are all made better because of participation.

If the congregation were to pray for better social and moral conditions in *the city* in which they live, *such prayers would be liable to be effective in some measure if the people in the city generally knew that the church people were praying thus, and much more, if the church people, strengthened and inspired by their prayers, were to increase and make more effective their points of social contact in the city.*

What is true of a city is true, of course, still more of the nation as a whole (Wr 273).

Even a whole city or an entire nation can be helped by such prayer devotions.

Suppose that in all the churches and synagogues of a city or of a nation one day every week the communicants were to come together and pray after this manner—“O God, we confess to Thee our remorse and shame at the sins of society for which we are in large measure to blame.... Lord, we have all erred and strayed from Thy ways in neglect of our obligations to this city (or nation)—have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!” If we could imagine such a confession as this being honestly repeated weekly in every place of worship in any city or in the land as a whole, can we imagine that it would be long before the reserve energies of the city or nation would be brought into action, and that these shameful iniquities would be removed from us! (Wr 273-74)

Confession, repentance, and prayer have led individuals, cities, nations, and whole races to mighty efforts of reform and courageous deeds of valorous achievement.

91:5.3 If you truly desire to overcome the habit of criticizing some friend, the quickest and surest way of achieving such a change of attitude is to establish the habit of

A good woman, when she heard any member of her family find fault with some one whom he disliked, was in the habit of asking the critic, "Do you pray for him?" It was a just rebuke. It is impossible to pray honestly for any one and not learn to appreciate the good in him, and to adopt a more human attitude toward him (Wr 272).

3. The possible effects of prayer upon the minds and bodies of other persons will be similar to those described, provided *one of two conditions is met;*

EITHER that the person who is prayed for knows that he is prayed for,

OR that the person who prays comes into social contact with the person for whom he prays (Wr 272).

III: THE DIFFERENTIATION OF RELIGION (Wright 18)

I—Introduction (Wright 18)

We have now, therefore, to consider the question, *How does religion become differentiated from other human interests and efforts?* How does religion develop its own specialized *methods* and *institutions*,—

praying for that person every day of your life.

But the social repercussions of such prayers are dependent largely on two conditions:

91:5.4 1. The person who is prayed for should know that he is being prayed for.

91:5.5 2. The person who prays should come into intimate social contact with the person for whom he is praying.

91:5.6 Prayer is the technique whereby, sooner or later, every religion becomes institutionalized.

And in time prayer becomes associated with numerous secondary agencies, some helpful, others decidedly deleterious, such as

sacrifice and prayer on the one hand, and gods, **priests**, and temples upon the other? (Wr 18)

priests, holy books, worship rituals, and ceremonials.

XIX: EVIDENCE OF GOD (Wright 339)

I—*The Conception of God is Symbolical and Anthropomorphic* (Wright 339)

91:5.7 But the minds of greater spiritual illumination should be patient with, and tolerant of, those less endowed intellects that crave **symbolism** for the mobilization of their feeble spiritual insight. The strong must not look with disdain upon the weak. Those who are God-conscious without symbolism must not deny the grace-ministry of the symbol to those who find it difficult to worship Deity and to revere truth, beauty, and goodness without form and ritual.

The conception of God is symbolical in both of these respects [*i.e.*, as standing for both a sentiment and an intellectual understanding]. *As used in religious worship*, it serves to center men's **devotion** upon a Being with whom men can feel themselves in sympathy (Wr 340).

In prayerful **worship**, most mortals envision some symbol of the object-goal of their **devotions**.

6. THE PROVINCE OF PRAYER

XVI: PRAYER (Wright 257)

VI—*The Efficacy of Prayer* (Wright 269)

4. Can prayer have any effect upon the *physical environment* whatever? Perhaps many readers who have agreed with the general course of the argument thus far would emphatically say, No. But, *in a sense* we shall see that *even the physical environment may be modified through prayer.*

The reported saying of Jesus that through *faith* his followers might remove mountains has seemed to many to be legendary, or figurative, or Oriental hyperbole. But in our time have not mountains actually been removed through *faith*? Railways have been built over the great back bone of the continent, so that our Atlantic Coast has become only four days' travel from the Pacific Ocean. [Etc.] (Wr 274)

2. The possible effects of prayer upon the bodily health of the person who prays are also great....

Organic diseases are those in which *organic tissue has been wholly or partly injured or destroyed*, such as tuberculosis, cancer, paresis, and the like.... *In cases of these kinds, prayer alone can no more be expected to effect a cure than it can to set a broken bone, make a crooked back straight, or restore an arm or leg that has been shot away in battle* (Wr 270-71).

91:6.1 Prayer, unless in liaison with the will and actions of the personal spiritual forces and material supervisors of a realm, can have no *direct effect* upon one's *physical environment.*

While there is a very definite limit to the province of the petitions of prayer, such limits do not equally apply to

the *faith* of those who pray.

91:6.2 Prayer is not a technique for curing real and *organic diseases,*

Roughly speaking, it is safe to claim that *very many functional diseases can be cured by means of prayer....* Ordinary headaches, constipation, indigestion, and nervousness would be examples. [Etc.] (Wr 270)

However, it is well known that the progress of an incurable disease may be somewhat checked if the patient remains in a cheerful frame of mind, and that his courage and confidence increase his chance of recovery from an infectious fever or a surgical operation. So that *while the power of prayer in such cases is restricted, it may be of assistance in connection with other agencies* (Wr 271).

Through prayer, an incurable **invalid** may overcome irritability and despondency; and, instead of being an affliction, he may become a benediction to those to whom he is dear, and the close of his life may be a stronger influence for good than had been his years of health and strength (Wr 271).

VII—*The Objectivity of Prayer* (Wright 277)

[Compare Wr 277-80.]

but it has contributed enormously to the enjoyment of abundant health

and to the cure of numerous **mental, emotional, and nervous ailments.**

And even in actual bacterial disease, prayer has many times added to the efficacy of **other remedial procedures.**

Prayer has turned many an irritable and complaining **invalid** into a paragon of patience and made him an inspiration to all other human sufferers.

91:6.3 No matter how difficult it may be to reconcile the scientific doubtings regarding the efficacy of prayer with the ever-present urge to seek help and guidance from divine sources, never forget that the sincere prayer of faith is a mighty force for the promotion of personal happiness, individual self-control, social harmony, moral progress, and spiritual attainment.

IV—*Prayer and the Subconscious* (Wright 265)

As William James has shown, *we all possess considerable reserve powers of subconscious energy.... Stored up in the brain and nervous system, as well as elsewhere in the organism, are large reserve resources of energy of which ordinarily we are unaware. There are various ways of tapping these sources....*

One means of approach to such reserve powers is found through the agency of the Alter, present in dialogue prayer.

This is the reason, probably, why as a matter of fact, *if sufficiently hard pressed*, we all *do* pray, however great our religious skepticism may be at other times (Wr 265-66).

VI—*The Efficacy of Prayer* (Wright 269)

[contd from 91:4.3] And it would be immoral as well as ridiculous to *expect God to solve the problems* of business or home for us, while we looked on at Him doing our duties. We should be parasites in such a case, shirking our own responsibilities.

But we may ask God to give us *wisdom and courage*

91:6.4 Prayer, even as a purely human practice, a *dialogue* with one's alter ego, constitutes a technique of the most efficient *approach to the realization of those reserve powers* of human nature which are *stored and conserved in the unconscious realms* of the human mind.

Prayer is a sound psychologic practice, aside from its religious implications and its spiritual significance.

It is a fact of human experience that most persons, *if sufficiently hard pressed*, will pray in some way to some source of help.

91:6.5 Do not be so slothful as to ask *God to solve your difficulties*,

but never hesitate to ask him for *wisdom and spiritual strength* to guide and sustain you

to solve our own difficulties; we can expect that He will enable us to attain our moral ends through energy made available for us through the Alter of our prayers (Wr 276-77).

while you yourself resolutely and courageously attack the problems at hand.

91:6.6 Prayer has been an indispensable factor in the progress and preservation of religious civilization, and it still has mighty contributions to make to the further enhancement and spiritualization of society if those who pray will only do so in the light of scientific facts, philosophic wisdom, intellectual sincerity, and spiritual faith. Pray as Jesus taught his disciples—honestly, unselfishly, with fairness, and without doubting.

VII—*The Objectivity of Prayer* (Wright 277)

The efficacy of prayer is not dependent on the worshipper's understanding of the philosophy and psychology of the process.

The efficacy of prayer is a matter of immediate experience; the existence and nature of God are difficult philosophical questions upon which it is unnecessary for the worshipper to make up his mind in order to receive the benefits of prayer (Wr 279).

91:6.7 But the efficacy of prayer in the personal spiritual experience of the one who prays is in no way dependent on such a worshiper's intellectual understanding,

philosophic acumen, social level, cultural status, or other mortal acquirements.

The psychic and spiritual concomitants of the prayer of faith are immediate, personal, and experiential.

There is no other technique whereby every man, regardless of all other mortal accomplishments, can so effectively and immediately approach the threshold of that realm wherein he can communicate with his Maker, where the creature contacts with the reality of the Creator, with the indwelling Thought Adjuster.

7. MYSTICISM, ECSTASY, AND INSPIRATION

XVII: MYSTICISM (Wright 286)

I—*Introductory* (Wright 286)

For Christianity and Judaism, religions for which the Agency is God, mysticism is accordingly the cultivation of the consciousness of the presence of God (Wr 287).

II—*Milder Forms of Mysticism* (Wright 287)

To Christians with different traditions, it [*i.e.*, mystical preparation] has sometimes meant “purgation,” to be effected by (1) rigorous “detachment” from every worldly tie that might in any way conflict with wholehearted devotion to God in the manner taught by the Church ... (Wr 288).

III—*The Great Mystics* (Wright 289)

[contd] The great prophets and saints of Christianity and Judaism have all possessed unusually profound grasp of moral and religious principles (Wr 289).

91:7.1 Mysticism, as the technique of the cultivation of the consciousness of the presence of God,

is altogether praiseworthy,

but when such practices lead to social isolation and culminate in religious fanaticism,

they are all but reprehensible.

Altogether too frequently that which the overwrought mystic evaluates as divine inspiration is the uprisings of his own deep mind.

The contact of the mortal mind with its indwelling Adjuster, while often favored by devoted meditation, is more frequently facilitated by wholehearted and loving service in unselfish ministry to one’s fellow creatures.⁴

91:7.2 The great religious teachers and the prophets of past ages were not extreme mystics.

They were God-knowing men and women who best served their God by unselfish ministry to their fellow mortals. Jesus often took his apostles away by themselves for short periods to engage in meditation and prayer, but for the most part he kept them in service-contact with the multitudes.

IV—*Spiritual Exercises* (Wright 292)

[contd] The most remarkable book of directions for the cultivation of inner religious experience is the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius Loyola (†1556), the founder of the Jesuit order (Wr 292).

The soul of man requires *spiritual exercise*

as well as spiritual nourishment.

V—*Ecstasy* (Wright 295)

91:7.3 Religious *ecstasy* is permissible when resulting from sane antecedents, but such experiences are more often the outgrowth of purely emotional influences than a manifestation of deep spiritual character. Religious persons must not regard every vivid psychologic presentiment and every intense emotional experience as a divine revelation or a spiritual communication.

Ecstasy may be a condition of intense inward mental activity accompanied by *outward calm*, in which the mystic is in intimate or even rapturous communion with God, Christ, the Blessed Virgin or a Saint. Or the ecstasy may be more *violent* in its manifestations, and the person may sing, shout, or dance (Wr 295).

Genuine spiritual ecstasy is usually associated with great *outward calmness* and almost perfect emotional control.

Visions are often experienced during ecstasy.... Professor Pratt thinks that, while the illusion in such cases may be complete and constitute a genuine hallucination, it is more frequently the case that ecstatic visions are merely “pseudo-hallucinations” in which the subject even at the time knows that they are subjective (Wr 296).

During ecstasy there is less than ordinary sensibility to external impressions, especially in the more extreme trance like forms (Wr 295).

VI—*Inspiration* (Wright 298)

[contd] We speak of a poet or artist as “inspired.” By this we mean that the man has been able to catch the significance of what others have thought or felt dimly and confusedly, and to give it an expression which carries conviction and affords satisfaction....

It is, indeed, frequently the case that an artist’s creative work is in part done subconsciously.

He feels impelled to write or to paint or to compose by some influence that he does not recognize as his own personality (Wr 298).

But true prophetic vision is a super-psychologic presentiment.

Such visitations are not pseudo hallucinations,

neither are they trancelike ecstasies.

91:7.4 The human mind may perform in response to so-called inspiration when it is sensitive either to

the uprisings of the subconscious

or to the stimulus of the superconscious.

In either case it appears to the individual that such augmentations of the content of consciousness are more or less foreign.

In the history of Christianity, there have been periods of high **mystical enthusiasm** when the **restraint** upon the prophets was comparatively slight.... But in every such instance standards soon had to be recognized; either some basis of authority and evaluation was found, or else the movement collapsed because of its increasing extravagances (Wr 299-300).

Unrestrained mystical enthusiasm

and rampant religious ecstasy are not the credentials of inspiration, supposedly divine credentials.

VII—*When are Mystical States Normal?* (Wright 300)

[contd] Into the difficult question whether and when mystical states should be classified as normal from *a medical* standpoint, a layman is not competent to enter. It will only be possible here to suggest the following as a simple working criterion—psychiatrists, of course, have better and more technical **tests**:—

*As a result of his mystical experience, is the person in better or in worse **health, physically***

*and **mentally**?* (Wr 300)

91:7.5 The practical **test** of all these strange religious experiences of mysticism, ecstasy, and inspiration is to observe whether these phenomena cause an individual

1. To enjoy better and more complete **physical health.**

2. To function more efficiently and practically in his **mental** life.

3. More fully and joyfully to socialize his religious experience.

4. More completely to spiritualize his day-by-day living while faithfully discharging the commonplace duties of routine mortal existence.

5. To enhance his love for, and appreciation of, truth, beauty, and goodness.

From a moral and religious standpoint a similar criterion is available.... *Whatever mystical experiences tend to promote the conservation of socially recognized values are normal; whatever mystical experiences tend to hinder the conservation of socially recognized values are abnormal* (Wr 300-01).

6. To conserve currently recognized social, moral, ethical, and spiritual values.

7. To increase his spiritual insight—God-consciousness.

91:7.6 But prayer has no real association with these exceptional religious experiences.

XVI: PRAYER (Wright 257)

III—*Merits and Limitations of Each Type of Prayer* (Wright 262)

The aesthetic prayer, employed alone, would lead to inactivity. Absorbed in blissful contemplation of God

the worshipper would forget to perform his obligations to his fellow men (Wr 263).

[repeated from 91:1.6] If private prayer were to be used by anyone to the exclusion of community prayer there would be grave danger that the Alter of such an individual would be narrow and unsymmetrical (Wr 263).

When prayer becomes overmuch aesthetic, when it consists almost exclusively in beautiful and blissful contemplation of paradisiacal divinity,

it loses much of its socializing influence and tends toward mysticism and the isolation of its devotees.

There is a certain danger associated with overmuch private praying which is corrected and prevented by group praying, community devotions.

8. PRAYING AS A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

VII: PRAYER (Wieman 129)

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF PRAYER (Wieman 129)

[contd] Men do not form ideas about prayer until after they find themselves practicing it. It is one of the vital functions of human living, like talking and tool-making, which spring up quite spontaneously (W 129).

Just as he found himself engaged in political activity before he developed an idea of the state, so he found himself praying before he had a distinct idea of God (W 129).

This spontaneous outburst of prayer arises under two very different circumstances:

when a man is in dire need and impulsively reaches out for every resource of help;

and in time of jubilation when the overflow of impulsive energy and enthusiasm must be expressed in praise and thanksgiving (W 129).

Since [the] practice of magic develops along with prayer there is no reason to think that prayer developed out of a prior practice of magic (W 131).

Rather it would seem that prayer and magic are two different lines of development that may proceed from the original, unpremeditated outreachings and strivings which we have described (W 131).

91:8.1 There is a truly spontaneous aspect to prayer,

for primitive man found himself praying long before he had any clear concept of a God.

Early man was wont to pray in two diverse situations:

When in dire need, he experienced the impulse to reach out for help;

and when jubilant, he indulged the impulsive expression of joy.

91:8.2 Prayer is not an evolution of magic;

they each arose independently.

The difference between prayer and magic is that prayer is an attempt to adjust the personality in such a way as to attain community of interest and creative interaction. Magic, on the other hand, is an attempt to exercise coercive power to get results, either directly or through controlling a deity or other spirit or force (W 130).

Since prayer is an adjustment of the total personality seeking community of interest and creative interaction, it is a moral and religious undertaking.

Since magic does not involve any such endeavor, it is not moral and religious (W 130).

After prayer gets started in its development from the spontaneous activity we have described, it becomes an established custom (W 131).

People then pray not only in time of extreme need or impulsive jubilation. They pray because others do (W 131).

They pray because they are afraid something will happen to them if they do not (W 131-32).

How diversified are the forms and interests displayed in prayer has been well set forth by Friedrich Heiler in the following passage taken from his great work on prayer:

“Prayer appears in history in an astonishing multiplicity of forms; as the calm collectedness of a devout individual soul,

Magic was an attempt to adjust Deity to conditions;

prayer is the effort to adjust the personality to the will of Deity.

True prayer is both moral and religious;

magic is neither.

91:8.3 Prayer may become an established custom;

many pray because others do.

Still others pray because they fear something direful may happen if they do not offer their regular supplications.

91:8.4 To some individuals prayer is the calm expression of gratitude;

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and as the ceremonial liturgy of a great congregation;

to others, a group expression of praise, social devotions;

as an original creation of a religious genius, and as an **imitation** on the part of a simple, average religious person;

sometimes it is the **imitation** of another's religion,

while in true praying it is the sincere and trusting communication of the spiritual nature of the creature with the anywhere presence of the spirit of the Creator.

as the **spontaneous expression** of upsurging religious experience,

91:8.5 Prayer may be a **spontaneous expression** of God-consciousness

and as the **mechanical recitation** of an incomprehensible formula;

or a **meaningless recitation** of theologic formulas.

as bliss and **ecstasy** of heart,

It may be the **ecstatic** praise of a God-knowing soul

and as painful fulfilment of the law;

or the slavish obeisance of a fear-ridden mortal.

as the involuntary discharge of overwhelming emotion, and as the voluntary concentration on a religious object;

It is sometimes the pathetic expression of spiritual craving

as loud **shouting** and crying,

and sometimes the blatant **shouting** of pious phrases.

and as still, silent absorption; as artistic poetry, and as stammering speech; as the flight of the spirit to the supreme Light, and as a cry out of the deep distress of the heart;

as **joyous** thanksgiving and ecstatic **praise**,

Prayer may be **joyous praise**

and as **humble supplication for forgiveness** and compassion;

or a **humble plea for forgiveness**.

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as a **childlike** entreaty for life, health and happiness;

91:8.6 Prayer may be the **childlike** plea for the impossible

and as an earnest desire for power in the **moral** struggle for existence;

or the mature entreaty for **moral** growth and spiritual power.

as a simple petition for **daily bread**,

A petition may be for **daily bread**

and as an **all-consuming yearning** for God Himself;

or may embody a **wholehearted yearning** to find God and to do his will.

as a **selfish wish**,

It may be a wholly **selfish request**

and as an **unselfish** solicitude for a **brother**;

or a true and magnificent gesture toward the realization of **unselfish brotherhood**.

as wild cursing and **vengeful** thirst,

91:8.7 Prayer may be an angry cry for **vengeance**

and as **heroic intercession** for personal enemies and persecutors;

or a **merciful intercession** for one's enemies.

as a stormy clamour and demand, and as joyful renunciation and holy serenity;

as a desire to **change God's will** and make it chime with our petty wishes,

It may be the expression of a hope of **changing God**

and as self-forgetting vision of and surrender to the Highest Good;

or the powerful technique of changing one's self.

as the timid entreaty of the **sinner before a stern judge**,

It may be the cringing plea of a lost **sinner before a supposedly stern Judge**

and as the trustful talk of a child with a kind **father**;

or the joyful expression of a liberated son of the living and merciful heavenly **Father**.

as swelling phrases of politeness and flattery before an unapproachable King, and as a free outpouring in the presence of a friend who cares; as the humble petition of a servant to a powerful master, and as the ecstatic converse of a bride with the heavenly bridegroom" (W 132).

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THE MODERN MAN IS PERPLEXED (Wright 133)

[contd] The modern man is very much puzzled in respect to this matter of prayer (W 133).

Often he quits praying altogether

except as some special set of circumstances may generate the spontaneous prayer that passes so swiftly he is hardly conscious of making it (W 135).

Must God be persuaded? Does he not already know what is best? Can he be induced to act otherwise than he would act anyway? Can there be anything reliable or even moral in a God who can be changed and persuaded from his course by the prayers of ignorant, foolish or selfish men? (W 133)

WHAT REALITY IS REACHED THROUGH PRAYER? (Wieman 137)

Vultures soar into the blue until they are invisible, mounting in a spiral, but never moving their wings. Their outspread wings, while motionless, are kept adjusted to the upper currents of air in such a way that they are lifted ever higher (W 137).

91:8.8 Modern man is perplexed by the thought of talking things over with God in a purely personal way.

Many have abandoned regular praying;

they only pray when under unusual pressure—in emergencies.

Man should be unafraid to talk to God, but only a spiritual child would undertake to

persuade, or presume to change, God.

91:8.9 But real praying does attain reality.

Even when the air currents are ascending, no bird can soar except by outstretched wings.

Prayer elevates man because it is a technique of progressing by the utilization of the ascending spiritual currents of the universe.

91:8.10 Genuine prayer adds to spiritual growth,

Now it is an observable and demonstrated fact that when we have one **attitude** toward persons and things, we find our activities connecting with their activities in such a way that mutual support, enhancement and meaning grow. With other attitudes this does not occur. (W 137).

modifies **attitudes**,

and yields that satisfaction which comes from communion with divinity.

It is a spontaneous outburst of God-consciousness.

QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIONS (Wieman 138)

God answers prayer with

91:8.11 **God answers man's prayer** by giving him

an increased revelation of truth, an enhanced appreciation of beauty,

growth of **good**, even though that good can be used for evil (W 139).

and an augmented concept of **goodness**.

(2) Sometimes the question is asked: Is prayer subjective or objective?

This question is very ambiguous. If "subjective" means what goes on in the personality, then certainly prayer is **subjective** because prayer is something that goes on in the personality (W 139).

Prayer is a **subjective** gesture,

But prayer is not subjective but **objective** if one means to ask whether any reality is reached by means of prayer which is greater than the personality itself. Prayer does reach such a reality (W 140).

but it contacts with mighty **objective** realities on the spiritual levels of human experience;

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[The growth of **meaningful** and mutually sustaining connections between activities is far wider and fuller than the single personality. Furthermore, it is **superhuman**. It is a doing which man himself cannot perform (W 140).]

The prayer is not the **words** at all. The prayer is the attitude of the personality. It is the endeavor to adjust the personality to God (W 141).

The function of the words is **purely auto-suggestive** (W 141).

God answers the attitude. He does not answer the words nor any practice of auto-suggestion, however important the latter may be as a means for establishing the attitude (W 141).

[contd] (4) If answer to prayer is growth of mutual support, is prayer opposed to all **conflict**? No (W 141).

While growth itself is marvelously gentle beyond anything man can do, the continuance of growth often requires struggle, conflict, destruction. In this struggle prayer has its place, providing the prayer is always for this **growth**, in it and with it and by the might of it (W 142).

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it is a **meaningful** reach by the human for **superhuman values**.

It is the most potent spiritual-growth stimulus.

91:8.12 **Words** are irrelevant to prayer;

they are merely the intellectual channel in which the river of spiritual supplication may chance to flow.

The word value of a prayer is **purely autosuggestive**

in private devotions and sociosuggestive in group devotions.

God answers the soul's attitude, not the words.

91:8.13 Prayer is not a technique of escape from **conflict**

but rather a stimulus to **growth** in the very face of conflict.

[contd] (5) Can we pray effectively for specific **things**, such as health, more money, a new automobile, or a better roof over our heads? Certainly.

But we must understand just what is involved.... The specific thing must be sought only for the sake of these connections, say for the sake of this friendship, for the sake of this better order of society, for the sake of the home life in its relations to the **growth** of **value** in the world (W 142-43).

Pray only for **values**, not things;

for **growth**, not for gratification.

9. CONDITIONS OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER

THE CONDITIONS OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER
(Wieman 144)

[contd] Some of the conditions of effective prayer are the following.

[contd] (1) One must earn the right to pray (a) by **facing the situation or problem** squarely, formulating it as clearly and analyzing it as fully as possible;

and (b) meeting all other conditions for its solution that one can (W 144).

(2) One must commit his wants to the **transforming** growth of meaning (W 144).

91:9.1 If you would engage in effective praying, you should bear in mind the laws of prevailing petitions:

91:9.2 1. You must qualify as a potent prayer by sincerely and courageously **facing the problems** of universe reality.

You must possess cosmic stamina.

91:9.3 2. You must have honestly exhausted the human capacity for human adjustment.

You must have been industrious.

91:9.4 3. You must surrender every wish of mind and every craving of soul to the **transforming** embrace of spiritual growth.

[contd] When God answers prayer he transforms persons, institutions and ideals into a higher unity of richer value. He who prays **must be the first to undergo** this transformation. He initiates it by his prayer. His prayer is the disposition of his personality whereby he is the first to be interwoven with growing connections of value.

Thus he **breaks the deadlock** so that God's growth can catch into its movement these other things and persons also, and the good of life be increased (W 144).

This is the true meaning of the words, **"Not my will but thine be done"** (W 145).

(3) **One must have faith** if his prayer is to be effective. That means one must be alert, responsive, outreaching and anticipative toward the growth of good wherever and however it may appear (W 145).

You **must have experienced** an enhancement of meanings and an elevation of values.

91:9.5 4. You must make a wholehearted choice of the divine will.

You must **obliterate the dead center of indecision**.

91:9.6 5. You not only recognize the

Father's will and choose to do it,

but you have effected an unqualified consecration, and a dynamic dedication, to the actual doing of the Father's will.

91:9.7 6. Your prayer will be directed exclusively for divine wisdom to solve the specific human problems encountered in the **Paradise ascension**—the attainment of divine perfection.

91:9.8 7. And **you must have faith**—living faith.

91:9.9 [Presented by the Chief of the **Urantia Midwayers.**]

1. *Contrast:* It is surprising that among these [Australian] peoples we find none of the religious ideas that would at first seem fundamental. There is no notion of prayer or other means of communication with spirits, gods, or supernatural beings of any sort. There are neither priests nor temples (Wr 9).

Spirits are believed to exist in definite spots which are known; but spirits are connected in no discernible way with the practices and beliefs that seem more properly to be designated as religious. If Australian tribes can be regarded as throwing light upon the matter, therefore, religious rites and beliefs originated independently of belief in spirits and supernatural personal beings, and only afterward did religion come to make use of these latter conceptions (Wr 15).

2. *Compare:* [A] religion may actually be conserving different and higher values for a people than those which they consciously endeavor to attain through it. We must always ask, not only, “What does a people *consciously* seek in their religion?” but also “What benefits, possibly wholly different, are they *actually* receiving from it?” ... (Wr 24).

3. *Compare:* Naturalistic and ethical prayers are often made for material and moral blessings to other persons for whose benefit the individual who prays is concerned. Such prayer can be regarded as egoistic in the sense that person whose welfare is a matter of solicitude to the individual virtually constitute a part of his larger self or ego, so that in the mental attitude of prayer they are identified with himself in contrast to the Alter from whom aid is sought (Wr 261).

4. *Compare:* When once those obstacles have been removed that stood in the way of whole-hearted devotion to the Alter, and concentration of attention upon Him, the sense of the Divine presence becomes more frequent, and requires less effort (Wr 288).