

## *Petitionary Prayer*

**T**HE GLORY of petitionary prayer is its demonstration of man's free will. Its shame is its domination by the baser emotions of fear and greed. Its tragedy lies in its irresponsible use.

Man does not live in isolation but in a particular environment, similar to a child in a school. There are always some aspects of the environment which appear to resist or impede each man's progress and happiness. Each difficulty matches a weakness in the individual and has been chosen before this incarnation to serve as an impetus to improvement. However, this is the point at which a person usually blindly resorts to petitionary prayer, like a child appealing to his teachers, parents, or friends.

As in the case of the school child, the effort to overcome environmental resistance can not only be along legitimate channels similar to an appeal for extra tuition but can take unpleasant forms, such as domination of others, similar to a child cheating in his work. The great test for legitimacy in both cases is the reaction of the environment. If the environment turns helpful, the method was legitimate but if the environment increases its hostility the method used was illegitimate. The safeguard is again on similar lines: All methods used by the child must be in line with school education policy and all petitionary prayers should be aligned to the law "Thy Will be done."

Conformity to Divine Law still leaves plenty of room for free will. Just as the extent of the child's choice of subjects increases as he progresses in school, so also the free will of man increases as he progresses spiritually, mainly because his will



Watercolor (c. 18160-20), William Blake, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

### *The Third Temptation of Christ*

*"All these things will I give to you."—Matthew 4:9  
God always gives what we need; the devil gives what we want,  
or are tempted to want—for a dire price, which we pay later.*

becomes increasingly attuned to God's Will.

The assistance or obstruction of the environment is indicative of each man's good and bad actions in the past. The consequences of bad acts have various levels of resolution. The most negative is to "suffer" the consequences, that is, passively undergo the process of adjustment. Other levels of resolution vary with mental attitudes and the ability to learn needed lessons, while the most positive method is adjustment through service to others using the cleansing power inherent in the application of the Great Commandment "Love thy neighbor." Using this principle, many legal court systems have introduced community service as an expiation for minor offenses instead of fines or imprisonment.

The consequences of good acts can be channeled in a host of ways, thereby giving the best opportunities for man to develop and express his free will. Unfortunately, there is a craving for material benefits, shown most clearly in every form of gambling, including the purchase of lottery tickets and the playing of slot machines, all of which are forms of petitionary prayers.

Under karmic law, sometimes expressed in the form “nothing can come to you that is not your own,” these petitioners ignorantly and wastefully draw off their own assets. They should seriously think about Solomon’s choice of wisdom when asked in what form he would like his assets (as related in 1 Kings 3:5-14 and also in 2 Chron. 1: 7-12). The scriptures specifically mention that Solomon could have chosen long life, riches, fame, honor, or the removal of enemies as channels for the same assets he used to get “an understanding heart.” The bible story goes on to state that Solomon’s choice of a higher channel brought about an overflow into lower channels so that he was also given the riches, honor, and long life which he had not asked for. Even today it happens that a Mother Teresa, whose assets have made her an example and a symbol of spiritual benevolence at its functional best, is also given a Nobel prize representing honor and riches.

The emotional atmosphere in which a petitionary prayer is made is of the utmost importance. It is the focussing of strong feelings which create the channel to higher, spiritual realms and bring down an answer. Formal, mechanical prayers have no effect simply because there are no links formed to spiritual forces. Petitions should correctly be made with positive feelings of optimism, gratitude for the opportunity, a determined courage to overcome obstacles, and a readiness to take the initiative and forge new pathways within the pattern of God’s will.

Unfortunately, any positive attitude in prayer is exceptional, the dominating attitudes being negative, especially those of fear or greed. Many people make their most fervent petitions only when in a state of abject fear, an attitude not conducive to spiritual progress because it increases the feeling of helpless dependency. Negative attitudes must

*The prayer for the desire body is, "Lead us not into temptation." Desire is the great tempter of mankind. It is the great incentive to all action, and in so far as the actions subserve the purposes of the spirit, it is good; but where the desire is for something degrading, something that debases the nature, it is indeed meet that we pray not to be led into temptation.*

*Love, Wealth, Power, and Fame—These are the four great motives of human action. Desire for one or more of these is the motive for all that man does or leaves undone. The great Leaders of humanity have wisely given them as incentives to action, that man may gain experience and learn thereby. They are necessary, and the aspirant may safely continue to use them as motives for action, but he must transmute them into something higher. He must overcome with nobler aspirations the selfish love which seeks the ownership of another body, and all desires for wealth, power and fame for narrow and personal reasons.*

*The Love for which he must long is that only which is of the soul and embraces all beings, high and low, increasing in proportion to the needs of the recipient.*

*The Wealth, that which consists solely of abundance of opportunities to serve his fellow men.*

*The Power, that alone which makes for the upliftment of humanity.*

*The Fame, none save that which increases his ability to spread the good news, that all who suffer may thus quickly find solace for the heart's grief.*

*—Max Heindel*

The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception

gradually be supplanted by positive attributes to the point where petitionary prayer is not needed at all, and one no longer cries in the dark but walks in the light.

The simplest and most common problem arising from irresponsible petitions is the postponement of needed lessons in life. The difficulties return again and again until resolved and usually each time the

confrontation is more painful. It is similar to an unpaid debt coming back for settlement, with further interest added each time, or like postponed medical treatment, needing progressively more drastic measures to effect a cure. In most cases, difficulties are best resolved as and when they arise so that petitionary prayer should always aim at direct resolution or alternative actions to settle the problems once and for all.

A somewhat amusing personal effect on the habitual petitioner (whether in robes or not) is his disposition to create an admiring circle of dependents among whom he functions as the authoritative channel to God. He gets more or less brainwashed by his continual demands to God to assert Himself in His own universe and arbitrarily interfere with its workings. The result is that, in turn, the petitioner feels fully justified in interfering with the lives of those around him and sees it as a sacred duty to rearrange other people's affairs to his own satisfaction. Of course he does this by petitioning God to attend to the details and very

generously gives God full credit for the entire operation. However, he seldom fails to remind the recipients of these favors of the key role played by him and the need to be grateful for his arduous, protracted, self-sacrificing labors on their behalf. There are various grades in this category, ranging from the endearingly simple "I'll pray for you" crooners to the fulminating, conversion-bent, hot gospelers who stride about in an authoritarian fashion figuratively jingling the keys of heaven and hell carried in their pockets.

A more dangerous situation arises when illegitimate means are used, deliberately or ignorantly, to obtain benefit. The most reprehensible method is the use of spiritual force to dominate others, even if this is done with good intentions. The immediate

results are sometimes dramatic, giving a sense not only of relief but also of personal power (a tell-tale sign of danger). Sooner or later, however, the inevitable environmental reaction causes such a flood of troubles and difficulties that the person is overwhelmed and often seeks more of the wrong means to obtain another period of temporary relief. The problems will continue until the bitter lesson

is learned that wrong means distort even good ends and that the environment (embodying karmic law or God's Will) is the judge of what should or should not be none.

All petitionary prayer represents the first stage of man's approach to God. There is an intense need to contact higher spiritual levels for reassurance and confidence. Without this orientation to higher goals, man realizes he will be lost amidst the distractions, temptations, difficulties, and problems of the material world. So he begins being highly vocal, making petitions which in their nature create and maintain a distance between man and God. His praise and thanksgiving are also vocal, often

made with the vague hope that his grateful appreciation will bring the response of further favors.

Gradually he transcends this self-created barrier and becomes aware of the nearness of God. When he begins to "practice the presence," as the mystics put it, non-verbal contact prayer replaces verbalized petitions, praises, and thanksgivings. The transition is not sudden, it takes place by gradually increasing communication by "contact" and gradually decreasing communication by "petition," until the time comes when no more petitions need be made and praise and thanksgiving blend into a state of silent awareness which spontaneously radiates its natural characteristics of spiritual joy and fellowship. □

—C.E.S. Gunasekera



*Under conditions of the greatest personal extremity, Christ Jesus gives what appears to be the highest form of petitionary prayer: "Not my will but thine be done." In fact, His words are not an appeal but a resolution and an affirmation.*

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