

## Dear Friends of the Foundation:

Yesterday I found among some other papers a note I had written to myself on the back of a four by six index card. It was dated February 16, 2000, and it said, "JHL—", i.e., John H. Leith, "H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, Chap. on Schleiermacher, footnote on prayer."

As it turns out, that book contains two chapters on Schleiermacher. And the one section on prayer has no footnotes. But it is a short section, and it occurs to me to share it with you here:

**Nothing betrays a man's genuine standpoint in theology more unerringly than his view of Prayer.** Here the pantheistic flavour which had always clung to Schleiermacher's idea of God is strongly in evidence and gives its predominant character to the whole. The definition from which he starts is meagre and unpromising. Prayer is the sense of need put in relation to our consciousness of God and directed towards the future. Not merely is the notion of our influencing God rejected firmly, on the familiar ground that there can be no interaction between creature and Creator; the writer keeps silence even on the cardinal subject of communion with the Father. Our only permissible attitude before the Most High is either gratitude or resignation. Gratitude for past bestowals there may be, and simple acceptance of all that is appointed us; but the Church must put no petitions in her prayers. We cannot say that things took place because we prayed about them. To God our prayer can never be a condition of His own Divine action. He would be a bold man who maintained that the total impression we gain from this account of things is in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. When petitionary prayer dies out of the Christian mind, its place taken by meditation, men shut their eyes to the fact that the believer is called to hold converse with the Father, and that this converse is a reality not for man merely but for God Himself. The background of prayer has now become a conception which submerges the spirit of man in the eternal Word-Spirit.

Schleiermacher is perfectly aware that the Church disagrees with him; but, with what we may perhaps call a certain lack of humour, he rejoins that for him to grant that God may be acted upon by prayer in any conceivable sense would be treachery to his first principles of thought. Such an admission, however, actually intensifies our feeling of grievance, for we had understood him to be reporting on the Christian mind, not refuting one of its convictions. It hardly needs saying that Schleiermacher's view of prayer has no foundation in the teaching of Christ. Our Lord offered prayers which cannot be described as prayers of either pure gratitude or pure resignation; if language has a meaning, they were petitions in which definite things were asked from God. The apostles, taught by Him, did the same; faith indeed always does so by instinct when it is childlike and has not been put off by sophistication. It will not sin by dictating to the Father; to every prayer it will add, "Thy will, not mine, be done"; none the less it will utter all that is in its heart, of wish as of thankfulness, leaving the issue to God alone. This is a point in personal religion at which the modern mind, only too faithful to Schleiermacher's lead, has been scared into dumb and sad acquiescence by a purely

gratuitous dogma about “the inflexible laws of nature”. It will only breathe freely once more when it has regained contact with Jesus’ thought of the living God.

Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1937), pp. 92-94 (emphasis added).

Even apart from the polemics, I think that what Dr. Leith would have us know is well comprehended in the first sentence:

**Nothing betrays a man’s genuine standpoint in theology more unerringly than his view of Prayer.**

Maybe this one sentence is, in effect, Mackintosh’s footnote on any theology that would discourage us from earnest prayer.

Grace and Peace,

Jim

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