

# Prayer as a Way of Ascension into Another Reality



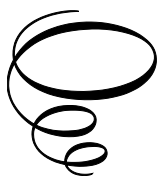
# Prayer as a Way of Ascension into Another Reality:

*A Philosophical Evaluation*

By

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## PREFACE

Prayer is the most important element of worship and a cultural phenomenon that has a multi-ethnic substrate; it is a universal means of addressing the object of one's worship. Prayer is a way of overcoming the border in the transition from the immanent to the transcendent, a wing for the implementation of transcensus (transcendence) - the transition to ideal dimensions of pure abstraction, communion with the revelations of unearthly existence in the realm of the Eternal Spirit.

In Christian teaching, prayer is a unique gift from God, the most acceptable way to express one's feelings, to express words of respect and gratitude to God. In the process of creating a prayer, its emotional sources - admiration, jubilation, joy, but also sadness and even despair, play an extremely important role. Prayers presented in the history of religions of the peoples of the world convincingly confirm this idea. However, it is not right to reduce prayer exclusively to an acceptable and convenient way of expressing feelings for the object of one's worship, as well as to approach this practice as a psychotherapeutic exercise that helps to calm down, to find psychological integrity of oneself. After all, the main thing in the origin and purpose of prayer should be sought in the very possibility of a person's direct appeal to God the Creator. From this point of view, the rite of prayer is something more significant than the simple cultivation of moral feelings, which are an indispensable component of religions with a developed moral element. Because they are reproduced in the process of life of people with an alternative worldview in relation to religion, who are also capable of demonstrating examples of moral behavior and virtue. It is in the vertical focus of prayer, the spiritualization of liturgical practice that its inner essence, its uniqueness, is hidden. Prayer is always more than a way of mastering supernatural powers, abilities, gifts - since this is where magic is practiced first and foremost - it is undoubtedly an accessible means of

turning one's gaze upward, to God, expressing one's respect and reverence to Him.

An unbiased view of prayer shows it not only as an important tool for satisfying certain religious needs, activating religious images, ideas, arousing appropriate emotions, not only as a factor in the dynamics of the believer's religious experiences, relieving excessive psychological tension, but also as the most important act of religion, which most fully embodies and reveals its entire essence. Belief in the real power of prayer, that is, one that rises above the necessity of the natural order, above the facts of everyday experience and the arguments of reason, is equivalent to belief in the unlimited power of a miracle, which often occurs contrary to nature, and belief in a miracle is identical to the essence of religious faith as such. Therefore, prayer, as the most important component of religious worship, and a miracle, as a special object of religious faith, are truths and values of the highest order for religion. In the Christian religion, any sincere and true prayer is a miracle, a source of miraculous power, on the other hand, God works miracles either at the request of the believer, expressed in prayer, or not revealed outwardly, but internal, deep, which still awaits a visible prayerful expression. The integrating factor of religious consciousness, which connects and brings together these elements of religion, is religious faith; it is it that unfolds the religious-symbolic environment in which ideas about the effectiveness of prayer and faith in the unlimited power of a miracle exist and function. From here arises subjective confidence in the identity of the objective and subjective, in the supremacy of supernatural will over earthly necessity, in the superiority of the spiritual over the natural. This book presents prayer as a way of ascending into another reality. This is personal relationship of I and Thou, a fervent confession of the human soul, because it is in prayer that a believer reveals to God the most secret corners of his soul, sets forth his long-suffering aspirations and hopes, something he would never entrust to anyone. This closedness, one might say the intimacy of a prayer of confession, a prayer of petition, a prayer of repentance, is a serious obstacle to the study of religion itself from primary sources, through the self-testimony of believers. And without this, we will not have complete and complete knowledge of religion itself, a huge part of



the religious heritage will also remain inaccessible to us, and hence the conscious and fruitful assimilation of this heritage.



# INTRODUCTION

At all times, the correct understanding of prayer, the study of its functional capabilities, as the most important manifestation and component of religion, which most fully embodies and reveals its entire essence, has been extremely important and always relevant. Its comprehensive and deep study could be considered as, in a certain way, a response to the practical need of humanity for a constructive understanding of the features of the Christian tradition and mastering the specific nature of religion in general.

The study of religion and its components, including (or primarily) prayer, acquires significant importance for culture in general, since under the conditions of the dominance of a religious worldview in the public consciousness, the entire culture of mankind was organically connected with religion, was based on it, and was energized by it. The above is reinforced by the fact that under certain conditions, prayers were the most important tool for the accumulation by individuals of a certain religious and worldview potential and their attachment to religious images and ideas. Moreover, prayer itself is a phenomenon and an element of culture that deserves a separate and independent study.

However, the prayer experience is not only the experience of being drawn into the irrational, but also the experience of a person comprehending himself, mastering himself, comparing himself with the external necessity of development. Therefore, in the study of prayer, the anthropological aspect is quite clearly traced and sounds. Prayer is able to compensate, fill the vacuums of real life, create certain positive counterweights to the negative factors of human existence. Therefore, in today's conditions, close attention to it as a powerful tool of religious consolation and relief of excessive psychological stress is an urgent need of the time.

Being the oldest institution of any religion, prayer is at the same time a religious phenomenon that deserves the close attention of researchers. The

importance of a separate study of prayer is enhanced by the fact that prayer, according to the apt remark of the German psychologist Wolfgang Trillhaas, is “the most intimate and most difficult to describe element of subjective religiosity.” And, finally, the study of prayer, in its broad sense as communication, interiorized dialogism, is important and relevant to the general worldview problem of the awareness of human communication in general, as the most important value of human existence.

# CHAPTER I

## PRAYER: ESSENCE AND PHENOMENON

### **1. Prayer as a Means of Relation**

A person does not exist in isolation, but always enters into various relations with the things he has created, the objective world and other people. However, the history of world culture convincingly shows that an important aspect of relations in general is the relationship of the individual with another (separate) reality, with the supernatural, which is intentionally aimed at by the consciousness of the individual.

Relation in general is a philosophical category that expresses the way of being the objects and functionaries that represent it, and their orientation toward special relationships and interaction. For a religious personality, being unfolds in the plane of the relations man - God, I and You, that is, relations with God, in God, and relations of man and the world, I and It. Naturally, the object of our attention is the first kind of relationship. It is they who are the living and active soul and core of any religion, who are able to reveal its specificity and originality among other religious traditions.

The relationship of I and Thou is necessarily inherent in any religion. The development of culture and the change of external contextual elements, in which the religious phenomenon is necessarily immersed, ultimately leads to a change in the relationship between man and God and even to the disappearance of some and the emergence of new relationships. The echo of these changes is quite clearly demonstrated by the great monotheistic poem of Hosea, which reflected the evolution of the Jews' understanding of the essence of their relationship with God, a relationship raised to a qualitatively new, higher level. On the other hand, with the development of

the whole set of these relations, and they are diverse and multifaceted, religion itself changes. Sometimes this development leads to the emergence of qualitatively new relations and, accordingly, to the emergence of new original religions, as we see in the example of Christianity, genetically related to Judaism. Undoubtedly, religious relations are diverse, as are the diverse beliefs of the religions of the peoples of the world. These relations are based on dialogism, which for a religious person acts as communication with God. Such communication is carried out by various means, the most important of which in various divergent cultures are verbalized; that is, we are talking first and foremost about prayer communication. It is through prayer that the relationship between man and God is mainly realized, it is the most important means and instrument for the development of this relationship. “If a culture ceases to be centred in the living and continually renewed relational event, then it hardens into the world of It, which the glowing deeds of solitary spirits only spasmodically break through”, - notes Martin Buber in this regard, referring to the history of religions of the peoples of the world<sup>1</sup>. In a wide range of religious traditions, both spontaneous communication with the numinous and the presence of formulated texts that mediate such communication are known.

Formulated prayers have an active influence on the worldview and psychological sphere of religious individuals, although this, of course, does not exclude the possibility of posing and resolving questions about the meaning of existence, the individual meaning of life in confessional prayers, penitential prayers, which are mainly acts of improvisation, a spontaneous impulse of a believer. Formulated prayers provide a standard stereotype of emotions, and their stable, and often canonically fixed, algorithm unfolds a generally similar psychological background, which becomes the subjective reason for accepting the truth of the religious ideas expressed in the text. From these positions, the question of the influence of prayer on the process of formation of a religious personality, which acts as a religious experience, as an inner revelation of God, becomes more understandable. And therefore, if the essence of religion lies in the relationship between I and You, man and God, then the most important form of this connection is prayer. Friedrich Schleiermacher, in his work “The Power of Prayer” (London,

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<sup>1</sup> I and Thou by Martin Buber. T. & T. CLARK 1923. P. 54.

1890), with his characteristic categoricalness, reproduced this idea more clearly, putting forward the thesis: "To be a religious personality and to pray are really one and the same thing."<sup>1</sup>

In this context, it seems timely to reveal what qualitatively distinguishes prayer from magical ritual forms, from incantations and spells, with which it, as well as, ultimately, the entire cult, is genetically connected. One of the facets of this difference is the coercive (forceful) influence (of magic) on the supernatural. This is precisely the influence, and not the relations, the relations that are realized in communication. Magic does not even imply the establishment of relations with the supernatural, but perfects its skill in the void. Prayerful appeal necessarily notes the presence of reciprocity - an appeal to God must be followed by a response. If the goal of prayer practice is to gain dominance or utilitarian manipulation of an object, this makes it similar to magic, or rather its tools - spells and incantations. Immanuel Kant, as is known, singled out this approach to prayer as a means of influence, as a way of objectifying one's desire, considering the rite of prayer as witchcraft. However, later Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel nevertheless points out the existing difference between them. After all, in prayer, Hegel is convinced, the believer appeals to the absolute will, for which an individual is an object of concern, and he can be heard and the content of the appeal fulfilled, but it can also be different - since the highest good goals are different. The essence of witchcraft is rooted in the passionate desire to exercise one's power in accordance with one's naturalness, one's passions and desires.<sup>2</sup>

In the early stages of the genesis of prayer, the expected response was supposed to be related to the sphere of the miraculous. However, with the development of human culture, the consequences of prayers begin to be sought also in the sphere of subjective and psychological influence on believers. The history of religions of the peoples of the world contains a

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer. Encyclopaedia of Religion (Ed. Mircha Eliade): In 16 v. New York. London, 1987. V. 11. P. 491-497.

<sup>2</sup> Георг Вильгельм Фридрих Гегель. Философия религии в двух томах. Т. 1. С. 435. Москва: Издательство социально-экономической литературы «Мысль», 1976.

huge amount of evidence of the universality of such relationships, as evidenced, in particular, by the empirical material presented in the work of William James<sup>1</sup>. The very emergence and development of prayer as such and its differentiation from other cult forms marked the emergence of a new principle of human-supernatural relations, the principle of verticalism, which began to dominate human culture with the advent of Christianity. The principle of verticalism is the principle of “openness” towards God, - argues researcher Yuri Levada, analyzing the specifics of the Christian tradition<sup>2</sup>. If magic is characterized by horizontal connections, because it practices contacts with completely material objects, things and phenomena, then prayer was initially and always felt and realized to be involved in the sphere of the numinous, that is, that which is connected with the presence of the divine - it directed man vertically, to the most perfect of the worlds, oriented and connected him with the transcendent. Yaroslav Orion spoke aphoristically about this period of the genesis of human culture, and of man himself, making a free paraphrase of the well-known maxim: “Man is an animal that knows how to pray.”<sup>3</sup> Such a vertical orientation of the prayer book in a certain way testified to the fact that the spiritual principle in man becomes the determinant of his being, of all manifestations of his existence.

One of the most important aspects of religiosity that permeates and colors the relationship between the believer and the supernatural is the feeling of dependence. It is the prayer book's orientation to the miraculous that is the most striking manifestation of this feeling. With the gradual disappearance of such orientation, the believer's attitude towards prayer eventually changes, and therefore prayer itself changes - in place of petitionary prayers, prayers of approval, thanksgiving, and praise gradually come, which begin to dominate in the totality of prayers used by both the individual religious individual and the community. Of course, the content of the prayer dialogue, as well as the specifics of the appeal and encounters with the supernatural, were conditioned and mediated by the corresponding religious ideas,

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<sup>1</sup> His famous work is in mind: *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. William James. MacMillan Publishing Company, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> Левада Ю. Христианство. Философская энциклопедия: В 5 т.: Т.5. М., 1967. С.449.

<sup>3</sup> Орion Я. Бог і релігія. Гамільтон, 1984. С.52.



dogmas, and religious doctrine. And the initial religious ideas, in which the feeling of dependence was most adequately reflected, were devoid of moral character. Gods were not the standard of the moral ideal, they did not carry the concept of justice. Psychologically, the first and essential attribute of the deity, - noted the French researcher Jean-Marie Guyau, was power, and it was considered terrible everywhere. The idea of the morality of the deity, in the form of ideas about the justice and mercy of God, is a concept of later origin: "Religion implies a nascent art of sociability, an elementary acquaintance with the springs which regulate the conduct of beings in society; there is a certain rhetoric in prayer, in genuflections and prostrations..." , and further "If our gods seem nowadays to be purely honorary, the fact was otherwise at a previous period."<sup>1</sup> An analysis of the content base of prayers that were at the initial stages of their formation convincingly testifies to the fact that the feeling of dependence was the most important element of the human-divine relationship.

With the emergence of world religions, the moral component becomes predominant in the sphere of human-God relations, it fills and determines both the conceptual element and the ritual-liturgical practice. "Myths and rituals of more ancient origin that were included in the new religions were in many aspects re-conscious in accordance with the new ethical content," researcher Vladislav Sherdakov notes in this regard.<sup>2</sup> Thus, later Judaism, and later Christianity, in the sphere of cult practice, abandoned sacrifices, recognizing them as unethical. "Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me... When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening.

Your hands are full of blood! - declares Jehovah through the mouth of Isaiah, - Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marie Guyau. *The Non-religion of the Future: A Sociological Study*. NEW YORK HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY, 1897. P. 67, 79.

<sup>2</sup> Шердаков В. Н. Иллюзия добра: Моральные ценности и религиозная вера. М.: Политиздат, 1982. 287 с. С. 88.

(Isaiah 1:13-17). Changes in relation to prayer were synchronized with this process. First of all, the type of prayers that prevailed in the arsenal of means of communication of the individual with the supernatural changed, as discussed earlier. Verbal (prayer) formulas play an increasingly important role of mediation in the structure of the I and You relationship. Meanwhile, the connection between man and God is realized both through verbal communication and through silent prayer practice, individual reflection, which is associated with the inner self-disclosure of God. Information about the initial stages of the genesis of prayers is characterized by scarcity and fragmentation; here it played the role of a verbal component and accompaniment of sacrifice. However, it is certainly known that collective prayer prevailed in primitive society, and the spontaneous impulses of the believer aimed at communication and meeting with the divine were rare and sporadic. It is obvious that group forms of ritual in the history of religions of the peoples of the world are primary in relation to individual ones.

With the emergence of universal religions that held the idea of a personal God, the motives of individual mystery began to prevail in the relationship between the believer and the supernatural, individual prayer began to spread, which is an unmistakable and most sincere indicator of the religiosity of believers. The circle of subjects of prayer activity became wider. Men's, women's, and children's prayers appeared and spread, as did formulas that differed according to the professional characteristics of the functionaries representing them.

If God is realized as a principle (law) or an idea, then the existence of reciprocity between Him and believers is problematic, as is the possibility of the fact of prayerful communion itself. Only personalized ideas about God-a-person are the basis of direct relations with Him, they are the basis of reciprocity that arises and becomes possible between individuals. However, God, according to religious dogmas, is the personality of all personalities, that is, an absolute personality. It is in this way that He enters into direct relations and communion with believers, giving absoluteness to all relations that are established between Him and man. This, in fact, presupposes “that,” - as Pavel Gurevich notes, - “communion with God cannot be understood as something that occurs apart from or above

everyday life.<sup>1</sup>“ It permeates all manifestations of the existence of the most pious prayerful people. It is in the quality of unceasing prayer that the special moral and psychological state of the Apostle Paul can be understood, who, spreading the good news about Christ, at that time, day and night, prayed fervently to God: “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. “ (1 Thessalonians 3:10). The absoluteness of religious relations inevitably leads to changes in the form through which these relations are realized. In contrast to the uncertain and timid attempts to approach the gods of polytheistic systems, the concept of later communication, the idea of prayer inevitably take the form of the doctrine of self-immersion, merging with the Creator and dissolving in Him, which are based on well-known formulas of self-identification, such as the “Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority” (John 14:10).

The I-Thou relationship is the quintessence of religiosity. One of the important principles of this relationship is that, being fixed by the canon and reflected in religious dogmas, doctrines, and myths, these relationships, although unchanging, are not frozen. True religious relationships, sufficient religious experiences, are characterized by a dynamism that is most fully reflected in prayer. In his fundamental work “I and Thou” the Jerusalem thinker and philosopher Martin Buber writes that the orientation towards the eternal transcendent Thou, the aspiration to master God is a universal tendency to organize religious life in a certain way, which ultimately leads to the emergence of faith that satisfies the thirst for integrity in man, and then to the practical union of the community of believers with their God in cult<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the thirst for mastery of God, the constant reification of Him do not contribute to real religious experiences, distort the purity of the I and Thou relationship and, naturally, do not act as a true guarantor of authenticity.

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<sup>1</sup> Гуревич П.С. Философская антропология Мартина Бубера // Бубер Мартин. Я и Ты. М.: Высшая школа, 1993. 175 с. С. 168.

<sup>2</sup> I and Thou by Martin Buber. T. & T. CLARK 1923.

And in this respect, prayer is an unmistakable indicator of the decline of religious relations, an indicator of the inflation of true, sincere religious feelings, when it no longer guarantees a real encounter with the Creator, but is, in Martin Buber's apt expression, an ersatz, a surrogate for religiosity. Jehovah, through the prophet Isaiah, condemned a similar quasi-religious practice of the Jews, which testified to the fading of religious feelings, the replacement of real religious relations with an ersatz one: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught" (Isaiah 29:13).

In true prayer, - Professor Martin Buber notes on this subject, - faith and worship are united and purified in their mutual connection. The fact that true prayer lives in religions is a testimony to their true life; as long as it lives in them, they live too. The degeneration of religion means the degeneration of prayer; the ability to have a real relationship with the object of worship is increasingly obscured in them by objectivity, and it is increasingly difficult to say to God - You - openly and sincerely. "And even as prayer is not in time but time in prayer, the sacrifice not in space but space in the sacrifice—and whoever reverses the relation annuls the reality" - notes Professor Martin Buber<sup>1</sup>.

The true revival of religious life, according to the apt remark of the researcher Paul Gurevich, who analyzes the philosophical heritage of the Jerusalem thinker, can only give renewal, which means a change and purification of the relationship, and therefore the filling of prayer with a burning feeling; that is, a sufficient renewal involves "a change not only of the goal, but also of the way of movement."<sup>2</sup>

The properties and specificity of any religion lie in the totality of all relationships that arise between the believing individual and the supernatural. Such relationships are realized mainly through dialogism, verbal communication, that is, through prayer. That is, in order to

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<sup>1</sup> I and Thou by Martin Buber. T. & T. CLARK 1923. P. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Гуревич П.С. Философская антропология Мартина Бубера // Бубер Мартин. Я и Ты. М.: Высшая школа, 1993. 175 с. С. 168.

understand the essence of religion, it is necessary to turn to its most important element, which most fully embodies and reveals its entire essence - prayer. Prayer is the most important means of realizing the relationship of I and You, man and God, man with God, man in God; it is the most widespread and most characteristic form of this connection, of the thirst for God, which is the quintessence of religiosity. When prayer dies - the living and active soul and essence of any religion - religion ossifies and disappears; and vice versa - the unmistakable evidence of the dying out of religion is the formalization and degeneration of prayer, the emergence of quasi-prayerful states and feelings.

## **2. Prayer and miracle – a special coherence**

The most significant phenomenon of religion, which most fully embodies and reveals its entire essence, is prayer; at the same time, it acts as that ritual and cult act in which faith in the miraculous powers of God, his incomprehensible ability to accomplish the impossible, is expressed most clearly. God and His Providence confirms, exhausts and manifests itself in a miracle and in a prayer. The very idea of God's providence is equivalent to the idea of a miracle, i.e. the realization of the impossible. A miracle is a proof and confirmation of God's providential acts, because the divine providence itself is a belief in the power that subordinates everything to its own power, against which any will of the world is futile. Because providence itself acts contrary to the laws of nature, because for him the latter is only a toy in the hands of supernatural omnipotence. When godliness most fully shows and proves itself in miracles, then its exceptionally significant manifestation, precedent and supernatural paradigm of other works of God is the greatest miracle of miracles - creation from nothing. Thus, there is reason to say that divine providence, miracle and the first miracle, as the beginning of all subsequent miracles, are concepts of the same religious plan; from a formal and logical point of view, they are, of course, not identical, although they are closely related. Their common purpose manifests itself in the fact that all of them equally testify and point to the only Creator and Miracle Worker, who objects any supernatural design with his own will, God. Ludwig Feuerbach subtly noted the organic connection between faith and miracle. "The specific object of

faith, therefore, is miracle; faith is the belief in miracle; faith and miracle are absolutely inseparable. That which is objectively miracle or miraculous power is subjectively faith; miracle is the outward aspect of faith, faith the inward soul of miracle; faith is the miracle of mind, the miracle of feeling which merely becomes objective in external miracles. To faith nothing is impossible, and miracle only gives actuality to this omnipotence of faith: miracles are but a visible example of what faith can effect. Unlimitedness, supernaturalness, exaltation of feeling – transcendence is therefore the essence of faith. Faith has reference only to things which, in contradiction with the limits or laws of Nature and reason, give objective reality to human feelings and human desires. Faith unfetters the wishes of subjectivity from the bonds of natural reason; it confers what Nature and reason deny; hence it makes man happy, for it satisfies his most personal wishes. And true faith is discomposed by no doubt.”<sup>1</sup>

An unbiased view of prayer shows it not only as an important tool for satisfying certain religious needs, activating religious images, ideas, arousing appropriate emotions, not only as a factor in the dynamics of the believer's religious experiences, relieving excessive psychological tension, but also as the most important act of religion, which most fully embodies and reveals its entire essence. Belief in the real power of prayer, that is, one that rises above the necessity of the natural order, above the facts of everyday experience and the arguments of reason, is equivalent to belief in the unlimited power of a miracle, which often occurs contrary to nature, and belief in a miracle is identical to the essence of religious faith as such. Therefore, prayer, as the most important component of religious worship, and a miracle, as a special object of religious faith, are truths and values of the highest order for religion. In the Christian religion, any sincere and true prayer is a miracle, a source of miraculous power, on the other hand, God works miracles either at the request of the believer, expressed in prayer, or not revealed outwardly, but internal, deep, which still awaits a visible prayerful expression. The integrating factor of religious consciousness, which connects and brings together these elements of religion, is religious faith; it is it that unfolds the religious-symbolic environment in which ideas

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach. *The Essence of Christianity*. Dover Publications, 2008. 304 pages. P. 181-182.

about the effectiveness of prayer and faith in the unlimited power of a miracle exist and function.

In a theological sense, the providence, where God testifies to himself and reveals himself, is equivalent to miraculous power, because in it the shackles of natural limitation are broken, and the otherworldly will reigns over natural law. The denial of supernatural providence is effectively a denial of the existence of God. When the recognition of the existence of God is identical to religious views on the world, and the denial of the existence of God is actually a denial of religion in general, then the non-recognition of God's providential activity deistically minimizes his presence in the realm of his own creation, reducing the existence of the world to the action of natural laws. However, the latter are not the subject of direct interest of religion and its intellectual reflection - theology. The main goal and meaning of their studies are God and man with God. If the general providential action, manifesting itself in natural laws, is, on the whole, indifferent to man, then the direction of a special supernatural providence is precisely man. Ludwig Feuerbach noted that if the former does not prevent a man who is unable to stay on the surface of the water from drowning, then the latter, removing all natural obstacles, allows a man to remain alive. After all, the real secret of theology, according to the philosopher, lies in anthropology, and the effectiveness of God in religion is dependent on human desires, because if the latter did not exist, there would be no motivation for certain supernatural actions.

The providence of God in religion is spoken of when we imagine God giving existence to an event or a sequence of events that would not have come into existence in any other way except with the participation of God. When these events are marked by surprise, unpredictability, and are notable for their favorable character for life and the character of individual people, we are talking about God's targeted influence on specific links in the universe in a miracle. Such supernatural actions are interpreted by theologians as God's "special providence" in relation to the world. "The supernatural image of providence unfolds where, according to the words of the church hymn, "the customs of nature are overcome" and God manifests his special power, which surpasses the laws of nature and is directed towards achieving higher moral goals in the existence of the world," taught the Orthodox theologian

Nikolai Malinovsky.<sup>1</sup> The leitmotif of all apologetic considerations regarding the action of extraordinary providence is presented in views on it as the cause of events incompatible with the usual laws observed in nature.

The worldview of Christian believers, as well as representatives of other Abrahamic religions, is based on the belief in the ability of providence to influence, modify and reorient events or chains of events, forcing them to overcome the general natural connections of the universe. Subjective confidence of this content is explicitly or implicitly present in the ritual and liturgical practice of the followers of the aforementioned religions. To a large extent, it is the psychological root of part of the prayer practice, where requests addressed to God have as a prerequisite the conviction in his ability to change events or shape them at his own discretion. Back in the eighteenth century, the Hasidic Rabbi Nachman taught his congregation to boldly implore God in prayer for the impossible: "Prayer is a mystery, which by its very nature is aimed at changing the order of the world. Every star and sphere is immovable in its place, but man seeks to change the order of nature; he implores a miracle."<sup>2</sup>

The subject of prayerful appeals to God is the desired, imaginary, but it lacks the necessary predicates of reality. In this sense, the miracle becomes the final point achieved as a result of the prayer act, since it is in it that eternal and higher religious truths assert themselves and faith in the objective power of prayer finds its external manifestation. Here, faith in the above sense, as well as in its broader meaning, objectifies and affirms itself, not being limited by the arguments of reason and not being embarrassed by the facts of experience, since the one who recognizes experience as the highest authority does not have true faith.

As is known, in cognition, truth as such is directly expressed in the form of certain logical structures - judgments, as a certain relation of the predicate to the subject. Moreover, if a person did not have the ability to establish judgments, he would not be able to speak about truth. In this regard, the

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<sup>1</sup> Малиновский Н. Промысел Божий. О Вере и нравственности по учению православной церкви. М.: Издание Московской Патриархии, 1991. С.117.

<sup>2</sup> Пилкингтон С.М. Иудаизм. Пер. с англ. Е.Г.Богдановой. М.: ФАИР-ПРЕСС, 1998. С. 207.



actual relationship between prayer and miracle is the following: prayer is the subject, and the miracle is the predicate; in other words, the object of faith in the objective power of prayer is a miracle. It is religious faith that reveals their true relationship, because for it, as Ludwig Feuerbach convincingly showed, there are no boundaries or laws, just as necessity does not exist for it, and even nature itself, since it seeks and recognizes exclusively the will of God, and everything else has a secondary and insignificant meaning for it.<sup>1</sup>

The history of world religions provides wide and diverse material for generalized statements that in the system of the religious complex, prayer is necessarily endowed with miraculous power, and a miracle becomes a consequence of fervent, genuine prayer;<sup>2</sup> the factor that enlivens the letter of religious dogmas and fills ritual and liturgical actions with inner burning is faith itself, because a miracle is not only a special object of religious faith, but also, often, the main goal of prayer practice and functional worship in general.

Thus, studying the genesis of Brahmanism, during the era of the growth of the role of professional caste priesthood - Brahmins, the famous Russian scientist Sergei Tokarev emphasized that prayer in Brahmanism, as a verbal component and accompaniment of offerings, acquires such enormous power that, according to the content of the Brahmanical beliefs of that time, the whole world obeys it. Its power, personified in the image of the great Brahma himself, as the omnipotent creator of the Universe. Moreover, at the everyday level of the religious consciousness of that time, the following ideas became widespread: the world is subordinate to the gods, the gods listen to prayers, and prayers are in the power of the Brahmins, and,

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<sup>1</sup> Feuerbach Ludwig. The Essence of Christianity. Second Edition. LONDON: KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER, & CO., Ltd. 1890. P. 173-193.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, prayerful communion with God, as well as its consequences, are declared by theologians of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to be "miraculous and qualitatively changing the entire life of the believer." (See: Восстановление Евангелия Иисуса Христа. Церковь Иисуса Христа Святых последних дней, б/г., б/м. С. 16).

therefore, the true gods-masters of prayers are Brahmins.<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, who called anthropology the true mystery of theology, notes in this sense that the true miracle worker is actually man, since the latter believes that God works a miracle precisely in response to his requests, even when the latter are not expressed directly in prayer, but are requests that express his intimate and inner aspirations: "Miracle is an essential object of Christianity, an essential article of faith. But what is miracle? A supra-naturalistic wish realised – nothing more."<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere in his treatise, he writes the following: "Faith does not limit itself by the idea of a world, a universe, a necessity. For faith there is nothing but God, i.e., limitless subjectivity. Where faith rises the world sinks, nay, has already sunk into nothing. Faith in the real annihilation of the world – in an immediately approaching, a mentally present annihilation of this world, a world antagonistic to the wishes of the Christian, is therefore a phenomenon belonging to the inmost essence of Christianity; a faith which is not properly separable from the other elements of Christian belief, and with the renunciation of which, true, positive Christianity is renounced and denied."<sup>3</sup>

And therefore faith in God, faith in miracles, and also faith in the miraculous power of prayer are phenomena of the same order. The writer Ivan Turgenev in his famous poem, expressed in prose – "Prayer", noted the following: "Whatever a person prays for, he prays for a miracle." Any prayer boils down to the following: "Great God, make it so that twice two is not four!" But can... God make it so that twice two is not four? To this, every believer must answer as follows: maybe – and the believer must make sure of this for himself.

A miracle, as a consequence of prayer, and God, in a religious sense, are different from each other, as an action and an active being – one is the source of the other, but their nature is the same. Miracles only indicate that the

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<sup>1</sup> Токарев С.А. Религия в истории народов мира. Изд. 3-е, испр. и доп. Москва: Политиздат, 1976. С.285-286.

<sup>2</sup> Feuerbach Ludwig. The Essence of Christianity. Second Edition. LONDON: KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER, & CO., Ltd. 1890. P. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Feuerbach Ludwig. The Essence of Christianity. Second Edition. LONDON: KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER, & CO., Ltd. 1890. P. 183.

being who initiates them is omnipotent, capable of satisfying the deepest and most secret desires of man, because otherwise a God who no longer works miracles, and therefore does not listen to prayers, does not satisfy desires, with the exception of those desires whose fulfillment is already laid down in the world order of events, naturally, perhaps, those which, thus, would have been fulfilled without him and without prayer, is an unnecessary, useless God. "The essence of faith, as may be confirmed by an examination of its objects down to the minutest speciality, is the idea that that which man wishes actually is: he wishes to be immortal, therefore he is immortal; he wishes for the existence of a being who can do everything which is impossible to Nature and reason, therefore such a being exists; he wishes for a world which corresponds to the desires of the heart, a world of unlimited subjectivity, i.e., of unperturbed feeling of uninterrupted bliss, while nevertheless there exists a world the opposite of that subjective one, and hence this world must pass away, – as necessarily pass away as God, or absolute subjectivity, must remain."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, faith in an omnipotent God who freely suspends the natural development of processes, can act contrary to the latter, accomplishing the impossible, and therefore miraculous, is an indispensable condition for the emergence of both a functional cult, and various forms of worship, and prayer, as well as religion in general. For such a God, nature is only an unlimited field for the manifestation of his omnipotence; for if God fulfilled only those prayers, requests and desires of believers which were fulfilled without his intervention, but exclusively within the limits and by the force of natural causes, if he exhausted his divine possibilities and resources before the invincibility and necessity of natural law, then such a god would be nothing other than a personified necessity called by the name of God.

It will certainly not be an exaggeration to conclude that the very soul and essence of any religion dissolves in the worldly and is completely annihilated when a mediating natural factor arises between God and the world, since the latter gradually and inevitably destroys the direct connection of "I and You", of the faithful and God. Where prayer does not

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<sup>1</sup> Feuerbach Ludwig. The Essence of Christianity. Second Edition. LONDON: KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER, & CO., Ltd. 1890. P. 184.

ignite in the most secret human desires, stopping before the limitations of the sensual world and its numerous obstacles, where it is already difficult for a person to be on the cutting edge of his own supernaturalistic desires for the miraculous, the supernatural “capitulates” to the natural, and the latter becomes a fateful obstacle for a truly believing soul, in which doubt arises. However, having overcome hesitations and doubts, the believer still continues to turn to such a God who is not bound in his definitions by natural necessity, but realizes them in accordance with his unlimited will. Such a God dominates the world order with unlimited freedom, he is not bound in his own plans and actions by external factors, but is able to act miraculously, both through natural factors and in spite of the latter, or even without them at all - arbitrarily, exclusively through himself, he is also able to deduce from quite ordinary grounds other consequences than those that correspond to their quality and nature; he, in the end, manages to significantly modify the state of processes themselves - that is, to change, destroy, mitigate or strengthen the result of the acting natural causes. According to Ludwig Feuerbach, - the omnipotence of providence is the omnipotence of the human spirit, which has been freed from any definitions and laws of nature, this omnipotence is realized through prayer, prayer is omnipotent: “The ultimate essence of religion is revealed by the simplest act of religion – prayer; an act which implies at least as much as the dogma of the Incarnation, although religious speculation stands amazed at this, as the greatest of mysteries.”<sup>1</sup>

The believer subjectively evaluates the achievement of a state of peace, comfort, religious consolation, self-mastery, that is, all that was discussed above, as a consequence of God's omnipotent help to man, his miraculous intervention in his earthly affairs, with the aim of unconditional and complete support and help. For any believer, theologians of all Christian faiths teach, prayer is omnipotent, and this, its main characteristic, first of all manifests itself in a miracle. The famous Protestant preacher and Baptist theologian Nikita Salov-Astakhov, author of the treatise “The Mystery and Power of Prayer”, stated the following on this subject: “There is one very common saying: “Prayer changes things”. These words contain a deep truth,

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<sup>1</sup> Feuerbach Ludwig. The Essence of Christianity. Second Edition. LONDON: KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER, & CO., Ltd. 1890. P. 175-176.

although it should be expressed in a slightly different way. It is not prayer that changes things and circumstances, but God, who hears the prayers of the sons of men, changes events in response to their prayers.”<sup>1</sup>.

In the Christian worldview, it is God who satisfies the prayer requests of the believer when the latter resorts to supernatural means to achieve completely natural results. Belief in the superhuman power of prayer presupposes a direct relationship with God, as the direct cause of miraculous interventions in the natural world. “FAITH in the power of prayer – and only where a power, an objective power, is ascribed to it, is prayer still a religious truth – is identical with faith in miraculous power; and faith in miracles is identical with the essence of faith in general. Faith alone prays; the prayer of faith is alone effectual. But faith is nothing else than confidence in the reality of the subjective in opposition to the limitations or laws of Nature and reason, – that is, of natural reason. The specific object of faith, therefore, is miracle; faith is the belief in miracle; faith and miracle are absolutely inseparable. That which is objectively miracle or miraculous power is subjectively faith; miracle is the outward aspect of faith, faith the inward soul of miracle; faith is the miracle of mind, the miracle of feeling which merely becomes objective in external miracles. To faith nothing is impossible, and miracle only gives actuality to this omnipotence of faith: miracles are but a visible example of what faith can effect. Unlimitedness, supernaturalness, exaltation of feeling – transcendence is therefore the essence of faith.”<sup>2</sup> When a person is burdened with doubts about the supernatural possibilities of God, theologians of various Christian denominations convince the flock, then his prayers are in vain, he also cannot hope for supernatural miracles. Just as a person does not always pray with the same strength and sincerity, so a miracle is performed exclusively in unusual cases, at the moment of the highest emotional tension, at the peak of prayer ecstasy; only sincere prayer reveals the true nature of prayer, only deep faith has a miracle as its huge desired consequence.

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<sup>1</sup> Салов-Астахов Н.И. Секрет и сила Молитвы. б/м., б/г. Издательство «Христианин». С. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Feuerbach Ludwig. The Essence of Christianity. Second Edition. LONDON: KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER, & CO., Ltd. 1890. P. 181.

The analyzed material allows us to assert that prayer, as an element of religious worship, and a miracle, as a special object of faith, are in an organic connection. Their real relationship, in the religious sense, is revealed in the following - prayer is the subject, and miracle - the predicate. Prayer, as a rule, is directed by believers to change the natural order of the world, its main goal is to persuade the almighty God himself to actions that would contradict the laws of nature. Therefore, the miracle itself is the ultimate goal of any real prayer, when God makes the impossible possible and creates everything from nothing. Only a weak faith in the supernatural power of prayer does not connect it with miraculous consequences and limits it to an exclusively spiritual result. Just as true prayer overcomes the natural necessity for a miracle, so the real existence of a supernatural God is connected with his miraculous activity; an inactive, passive and indifferent god, who acts exclusively through natural laws, is, as a rule, not an object of worship and the true God of religion in general.

For believers, there is no doubt that the God of true faith works miracles for man and in the name of man. Such his providential activity is a response to prayer requests addressed to him, or a consequence of satisfying intimate, sometimes not even expressed outwardly, secret desires of the believer. Hence, the miracles of geology, paleozoology, paleobotany are not real miracles, since they do not directly concern man. A believer, hoping for a miracle, turns in prayers to God not as to a distant, but as to a direct cause of all things, phenomena and processes in the world. He proceeds from faith in the sacred, supernatural power of prayer, which follows miracles and finds itself in the extreme, affective states of the human psyche, at the peak moment of tension of all its spiritual forces. It is then that a person, experiencing a situation of altered states of consciousness, partially loses contact with reality and, ignoring natural necessity and all mediating natural forces and factors, enters into a direct relationship with the object of his worship. From here arises a subjective confidence in the identity of the objective and the subjective, in the superiority of supernatural arbitrariness over earthly necessity, in the superiority of the spiritual over the natural. And, finally, a miracle is not only a special object of religious faith, but also, often, the main goal of prayer practice and functional worship in general.