Theological work is the leading theme of the fourth and final series of these lectures. In the first series we discussed the special place that is assigned theology by its object; in the second series, the manner of existence of the theologian; and in the third series, the danger to which theology and the theologian are exposed. In the remaining four lectures our attention will be occupied by what must be done, performed, and accomplished in theology.

At the outset, two things must be obvious after all that has immediately preceded this lecture. First, all theological work can be undertaken and accomplished only amid great distress, which assails it on all sides. But though this distress may befall theology from within and without, it is ultimately caused by the object of theology itself. Without judgment and death there is no grace and no life for anybody or anything, and, least of all, for theology. For this reason there is no courage in theology without humility, no exaltation without abasement, no courageous deeds without the knowledge that by our power alone nothing at all can be done. But secondly, theological work should be boldly begun and carried forward because, hidden in the great distress in which alone it can take place, its still greater hope and impulse are present. Precisely in judgment is grace displayed and granted; precisely in death is life awakened and sustained. Precisely in humility may courage be taken. In theology, precisely he who abases himself is he who may, indeed must, rise up. Precisely the knowledge that by our own power nothing at all can be accomplished, allows and requires courageous action. Wherever theology becomes and remains faithful to its
object, both God's grace and God's judgment, and consequently both the sinner's death and his salvation, must be taken equally seriously. In spite of all solitude and doubt, theology will be faithful to its object only and precisely when it allows itself to be tempted by it. While theological work is in great danger arising from judgment and sin, it is yet to be undertaken with still greater hope in grace and salvation. While in the following we shall certainly continue keeping the first in sight, what concerns us in the last lectures is specifically the second member of these contrasting pairs.

The first and basic act of theological work is prayer. Prayer must, therefore, be the keynote of all that remains to be discussed. Undoubtedly, from the very beginning and without intermission, theological work is also study; in every respect it is also service; and finally it would certainly be in vain were it not also an act of love. But theological work does not merely begin with prayer and is not merely accompanied by it; in its totality it is peculiar and characteristic of theology that it can be performed only in the act of prayer. In view of the danger to which theology is exposed and to the hope that is enclosed within its work, it is natural that without prayer there can be no theological work. We should keep in mind the fact that prayer, as such, is work; in fact, very hard work, although in its execution the hands are most fittingly not moved but folded. Where theology is concerned, the rule Ora et labora! is valid under all circumstances—pray and work! And the gist of this rule is not merely that orare, although it should be the beginning, would afterward be only incidental to the execution of the laborare. The rule means, moreover, that the laborare itself, and as such, is essentially an orare. Work must be that sort of act that has the manner and meaning of a prayer in all its dimensions, relationships, and movements.

Some of the most significant dimensions of the unity of prayer and theological work are the following:

1. Proper and useful theological work is distinguished by the fact that it takes place in a realm which not only has open windows (which in themselves are admittedly good and necessary) facing the surrounding life of the Church and world, but also and above all has a skylight. That is to say, theological work is opened by heaven and God's work and word, but it is also open toward heaven and God's work and word. It cannot possibly be taken for granted that this work is performed in this open realm, open toward the object of theology, its source and goal, and in this way open toward its great menace and the still greater hope which is founded upon its object. If theological work should attempt to hide itself from danger and hope, it would soon find itself locked in a closed, barred, stuffy, and unlit room. In itself, the realm of theology is no larger and better than the realm of human questions and answers, human inquiry, thought, and speech. What theologian is there who is not continually surprised to find, even when he endeavors wholly and perhaps very seriously to press forward to relatively true and important insights and statements, that he is moving about in a human, all too human, circle like a squirrel in a cage? He may be listening more and more attentively to the witness of the Bible, and understanding more and more lucidly the confessions of faith, the voices of the Church fathers and of contemporaries, all the time combining these with the required openness to the world. As he lingers here and there on different occasions, he may, no doubt, come upon problems that are certainly interesting, or perceptions that are thought provoking or even exciting. The only flaw is that the whole subject (and, as a result, each particular topic as well) does not begin to shed light or to take on contours and constant features. In that case it makes no
difference whether the theologian is totally devoted to his cause or whether the windows are opened wide as possible on all sides; his whole subject, nevertheless, refuses to display its unity, necessity, helpfulness, and beauty.

What, then, is lacking? The flaw is that however industriously he labors at his work or however widely and broadly it may be extended, the theologian exists basically alone in all his work. His work takes place in an area that unfortunately is vertically sealed off; it neither receives nor beholds light from above. It opens no skylight toward heaven. What can and must happen to remedy this predicament?

A special measure must obviously be taken; the circular movement must be interrupted; a Sabbath day must be inserted and celebrated. The purpose of the Sabbath is not to eliminate the working days or to divest them of their proper tasks, but rather to obtain for them precisely the light from above which they lack. How can this happen? What can and should happen is that the theologian for a moment should turn away from all his efforts in the performance of the intellectus fidei. At such a moment he can and should turn exclusively toward the object of theology, himself, to God. But what else is such a turning to God than the turning of prayer? For in prayer a man temporarily turns away from his own efforts. This move is necessary precisely for the sake of the duration and continuation of his own work. Every prayer has its beginning when a man puts himself (together with his best and most accomplished work) out of the picture. He leaves himself and his work behind in order once again to recollect that he stands before God. How could he ever find it unnecessary to recollect this fact continually and anew? He stands before the God who, in his work and word, is man’s Lord, Judge, and Saviour. He recognizes also that this God stands before him, or rather draws near to him, in His work and word. This is the mighty, holy, and merciful God who is the great threat and the still greater hope of man’s work.

Prayer begins with the movement in which a man wishes and seeks to win new clarity about the fact that “God is the one who rules.” A man prays, not in order to sacrifice his work or even to neglect it, but in order that it may not remain or become unfruitful work, so that he may do it under the illumination and, consequently, under the rule and blessing of God. As much as any other work, theological work is encouraged and directed to begin with this conscious movement of prayer. He who wants to do this responsibly and hopefully must know clearly who the one is who is both the threat and the hope of theology. Specifically, the question and inquiry about God will always demand and form a special activity. Other activities must retreat behind this one for a while (just as the activities of the week retreat behind the activity of the Sabbath). They do this just in order to be proper activities in their own right. They are disclosed and set in the proper light by prayer.

2. The object of theological work is not some thing but some one. He is not a highest or absolute something (even if this were “the ground of Being,” or the like). This object is not an “It” but a “He.” And He, this One, exists not as an idle and mute being for Himself, but precisely in His work which is also His Word.

The task of theological work consists in listening to Him, this One who speaks through His work, and in rendering account of His Word to oneself, the Church, and the world. Primarily and decisively, however, theological work must recognize and demonstrate that the Word of this One is no neutral announcement, but rather the critical moment of history and the com-
munion between God and man. This Word is God's address to men. "I am the Lord your God, who led you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me." Only as such an address can this Word be spoken and heard, and only as such is it the Word of the truth of God's work, the truth of God himself. For this reason all human thought and speech in relation to God can have only the character of a response to be made to God's Word.

Human thought and speech cannot be about God, but must be directed toward God, called into action by the divine thought and speech directed to men, and following and corresponding to this work of God. Human thought and speech would certainly be false if they bound themselves to a divine "It" or "something," since God is a person and not a thing. But human thought and speech concerning God could also be false and would at any rate be unreal if they related themselves to him in the third person. What is essential for human language is to speak of men in the first person and of God in the second person. True and proper language concerning God will always be a response to God, which overtly or covertly, explicitly or implicitly, thinks and speaks of God exclusively in the second person. And this means that theological work must really and truly take place in the form of a liturgical act, as invocation of God, and as prayer.

There remains a veil of theological thought and speech in the third person, but this veil always affords a glimpse beyond itself. In a direct unveiling of this situation, Anselm of Canterbury surpassed the first form of his doctrine of God (which was called and was a "Monologion") by a second form, which he called a "Proslogion." In this second work he actually unfolded all that he had to say concerning God's existence and essence in the form of direct address to God, as a single prayer from beginning to end. And at the beginning of the eighteenth century, obviously in recollection of the same fact, the Lutheran David Hollaz made at least the conclusion of every single article of his dogmatics a Suspirium, a sigh of explicit prayer. Any theology which would not even consider the necessity to respond to God personally could only be false theology. It would exchange what is real for what is unreal if it did not unfailingly keep sight of this I-Thou relationship in which God is man's God and man is God's man. Implicitly and explicitly, proper theology will have to be a Proslogion, Suspirium, or prayer. It will meditate on the fact that God can be its object only because he is the acting and speaking subject upon whom all depends. Every liturgical movement in the Church arrives too late if its theology is not itself a liturgical movement from the very beginning, if it is not set in motion by Proskynesis, i.e., by adoration.

3. Theological work is distinguished from other kinds of work by the fact that anyone who desires to do this work cannot proceed by building with complete confidence on the foundation of questions that are already settled, results that are already achieved, or conclusions that are already arrived at. He cannot continue to build today in any way on foundations that were laid yesterday by himself, and he cannot live today in any way on the interest from a capital amassed yesterday. His only possible procedure every day, in fact every hour, is to begin anew at the beginning. And in this respect theological work can be exemplary for all intellectual work. Yesterday's memories can be comforting and encouraging for such work only if they are identical with the recollection that this work, even yesterday, had to begin at the beginning and, it is to be hoped, actually began there. In theological science, continuation always means "beginning once again at the beginning."
view of the radical exposure of this science to danger, this is obviously the only possible way. The endangering of theology is strong enough to cut the ground away from under the feet of the theologian time and again and to compel him to look around anew for ground on which he can stand as if he had never stood on such ground before. And above all, the ever-new start is the only possible way because the object of theology is the living God himself in his free grace, Israel’s protector who neither slumbers nor sleeps. It makes no difference whether theological work is done with attention to the witness of Scriptures, with the reassuring connection to the communio sanctorum of all times, and certainly also with a thankful memory of the knowledge previously attained by theology. If God’s goodness is new every morning, it is also every morning a fully undeserved goodness which must give rise to new gratitude and renewed desire for it.

For this reason every act of theological work must have the character of an offering in which everything is placed before the living God. This work will be such an offering in all its dimensions, even if it involves the tiniest problem of exegesis or dogmatics, or the clarification of the most modest fragment of the history of the Church of Jesus Christ, but, above all, if it is the preparation of a sermon, lesson, or Bible study. In this act of offering, every goal that previously was pursued, every knowledge that previously had been won, and, above all, every method that was previously practiced and has supposedly proved its worth, must be thrown into the cauldron once again, delivered up to the living God, and proffered to him as a total sacrifice.

Theological work cannot be done on any level or in any respect other than by freely granting the free God room to dispose at will over everything that men may already have known, produced, and achieved, and over all the religious, moral, intellectual, spiritual, or divine equipage with which men have traveled. In the present continuation of what was won yesterday, the continuity between yesterday and today and between today and tomorrow must be submitted to God’s care, judgment, and disposing. Theology can only be a really free and happy science in a continually new performance of this voluntary offering. If it does not want to succumb to hardening of the arteries, barrenness, and stubborn fatigue, its work should at no step of the way become a routine or be done as if it were the action of an automaton. Because it has to be ever renewed, ever original, ever ready to be judged by God himself and by God alone, theology must be an act of prayer. The work of theology is done when nothing else is accomplished but the humble confession. “Not as I will, but as thou wilt!”

This prayer and confession will not harm the readiness and willingness with which a man accepts the task of a theologian, in performing the requirements of the intellectus fidei, to seek the truth, to inquire and think about it, to crack the hard nuts, and to split the thick logs of the problems facing him. The purpose of the ever-new subjection of theology and of the theologian to God’s will and judgment is simply this: the intellectus fidei should be, remain, and ever again become a human work that is vigorous, fresh, interesting, and helpful. It is a fact that this work can be and is done with vigor only when it is done not in some sort of rearmament over against its object but in the undaunted disarmament and capitulation to its object—that is to say, in the work of prayer.

4. We now approach what is, in practical terms, the most tangible and also, objectively, the decisive point. Theological work is done in the form of human ques-
tions and answers. It is a seeking and finding with respect to the work and word of God.

Two problems unmistakably arise here with respect to the possibility of accomplishing this work. One stems from the side of the "subjective," the other from that of the "objective." Both are related and bound to one another. Both are problems of the living communion between God and man and man and God, and for this reason they can be solved pragmatically, never ideally, only in the history of this communion.

On the one hand (subjectively) there is the problem of the appropriateness and capability of human acts. Is this matter really taken up by a man with the purity of heart, serious intentions, clear head, and good conscience which are appropriate to it and which alone give this whole undertaking promise? In what situation, and for what theologian, could this question be positively answered other than by saying: God's grace is powerful enough to give even a man's impure heart, hesitant will, weak head, and bad conscience the capacity to ask and answer meaningfully with respect to God and his work and word. But is this grace shown to this man? And on the other hand (objectively) there is the problem of the presence of God in his self-disclosure, without which even the most earnest questions and answers with respect to him would necessarily be void of an object, and therefore in vain. Once again, this problem can be positively answered only by saying: God's grace is free and powerful enough for this work too. God will do it himself. But will grace really occur in this sense? In this, as in the former case, grace would obviously not be grace if there was any reason to assume that grace—God making man receptive for him and himself for man—will automatically or necessarily occur. If grace is what occurs there, God can only be appealed to for it, entreated for it, and called upon for its demonstration. Only when theological work begins with this entreaty can it be risked in view of these two problems. Only when it is upheld by this supplication and repeatedly returns to it can theological work be done with prospects of possible fulfillment. What God will be asked for is the wondrous thing, that man's blind eyes and deaf ears may be opened, that he may be permitted to do and to hear God's work and word. And, at the same time, something still more wonderful will be sought by prayer: that God's work and word may not be withdrawn, but may, instead, be disclosed to the eyes and ears of this man. Gazing upon himself, Anselm prayed: *Revela me de me ad te! Da mihi, ut intelligam!* (Revel me from myself to thee! Grant that I may understand!) And gazing upon God: *Redde te mihi! Da te ipsum mihi, Deus meus!* (Restore thyself to me! Give thyself to me, my God!) In the performance of theological work the realization of this double act of God (together with this double entreaty) is necessary throughout, since God's act in both respects can occur only as his free act of grace and wondrousness.

Properly understood, this act is still only a single one, the very one which we called to mind at the end of our fifth lecture: *Veni, Creator Spiritus!* In his movements from below to above and from above to below, the one Holy Spirit achieves the opening of God for man and the opening of man for God. Theological work, therefore, lives by and in the petition for his coming. All its questions, inquiries, reflections, and declarations can only be forms of this petition. And only in God's hearing of this entreaty is theological work at any time a successful and useful work. Only so can it, in its total endangering and its total dependence on God's free grace, serve to the glory of God and the salvation of men. God hears genuine prayer! And the criterion of the genuineness of this prayer is that it will be made in
certainty that it will be heard. If this petition were born of skepticism, how should the speaker really know what he is doing when he entreats the Father in the name of the Son for the Holy Spirit? The certainty that this petition will be heard is consequently also the certainty in which theological work may and should be courageously started and performed.