

# AN OPEN LETTER ON TALKING WITH GOD

2483 Easter Eve '91

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Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Here's what you asked me for, some notes toward a feature article on prayer in a secular magazine. Not long ago, most folks would think you were joking if you put "prayer" & "a secular magazine" in the same sentence. The fact that fewer now would laugh suggests why a secular magazine would be wise to have an article on prayer: the old secular securities & confidences are less satisfying now, providing an aperatura on the sacred, a window of opportunity for "spirituality" (the biggest word-bag for the fons et origo & raison d'etre of religion).

And of course you'd like to know where, right now, "prayer" is "newsworthy." Again, that's sounding less like an oxymoron than it would have a few years ago.

My notes are helter-skelter, put down as they come to mind, in hope you may find something useful at least as stimulus. I've been pumping it all up into the tank & now am about to pull the chain. (You don't catch my reference?  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cs. ago in Denmark, to take a shower you had first to pump the water up into the tank, then pull the chain. SK [Kierkegaard] once pulled the chain & said to himself, "This isn't just the way I shower: it's also the way I write.")

1 I changed your "Talking TO God" to "Talking WITH God." Though the latter, being two-way, is truer to prayer, the former may make a better title for your article because (1) it's the more common phrase, because (2) it's what most people who pray think is going on when they pray (talking prayer being easier than talking-&-listening prayer). But also: in common English, "to" can have the force of "with"--as in "I was talking to my friend...."....The point I'm making, however, is not picky. Prayer that fails to be **conversation** with God is dry, ritualistic, "having the form of godliness but denying the power thereof" (2Tim.3.5 KJV).

2 "**Communion**" means the Mystery (in Orthodoxy), the Mass (in Roman Catholicism), the Eucharist (in the Lutheran & Episcopal churches), the Lord's Supper (in the Methodist & a few other churches), & (in most other churches) the Lord's Supper. Rather, all those expressions for the Sacred Table, the Holy Meal, the regular Christian feast are so many ways of pointing to Christianity's central liturgical event the essence of which is *κοινωνία* *koino·nia*, com-m-union, being united with God in prayer & with one another in conversation & common action. Always & everywhere the celebration of the central feast includes listening/talking to God, in the double action--a shared heritage with the syagogue--of **Scripture reading & prayer**. (Personal note: My practice is to preface the scriptures not with "Let us listen TO the Word of the Lord" but "Let us listen FOR the Word of the Lord": the Bible is not the Word of God but the primary literary channel for that Word.)

3 **Jewish** practice provides, here, light we Christians need. The whole of public worship can be called by its essence, viz "prayer" (as in GATES OF PRAYER, the official Reform prayerbook). It's a reminder that the heart of collective, collective-private, & private worship is prayer. (By "collective-private" I mean the personal praying, formal & extempore, each worshiper does as it were as descant or loose counterpoint to the collective worship.)....Public worship can also be called "Torah [Scripture reading & exposition] and prayer."....And the whole of Jewish life (religion & ethics) is "prayer & almsgiving" (ie, what's owed to God + what's owed to neighbor--"almsgiving" signaling not just material generosity but the generous spirit of good will)....Notice that "prayer" is the continuum of all this, the shishkebab skewer....In substance, all the above is true also of Christianity; but the more varied Christian language tends to obscure what Jewish language keeps clear, viz that "prayer" is "it," "where it's at," in & out of synagogue-temple & on both sides of the mezuzah.

4 Can prayer unite "the religions of the West," viz Judaism, Christianity, & Islam? Yes, Martin Buber would say, for prayer is God in the second person: we differ less in addressing God than in revelation (God in the first person) or theology (God in the third person). The Camp David Accords were prayer-born. President Carter wrote a prayer for Egypt's Sadat & Israel's Begin to revise; & nothing else happened.

till the three agreed on a text they could, & did, pray together. Prayer can be, should be, **uniting** across all human divides.

5 Now, in flatland, the world unopen to the spiritual, prayer can be **radical**. Two stories, one beginning in 1941 & the other the next year:

**Koinonia Farms**, Americus, GA, was cofounded as an interracial farming community in 1941 by Clarence Jordan, later famous for "The Cottonpatch New Testament." The previous year, I remember his response to our professor in a doctoral seminar on "The Greek of Matthew." When the professor said, "The Sermon on the Mount foresees how we will live when the Kingdom of God fully comes," Clarence--a man of deep prayer & commitment--said, "What would happen if we were to try & live that way now?" "Nobody to stop you from finding out," said W. Hersey Davis. Clarence soon found out, all right. Redneck machinegun fire through the buildings at night, so the community had to live in basements. Surrounding white communities considered Koinonia untouchable. When Clarence died decades later, white officials would not come to confirm the death. The community put the corpse on a farm wagon, & took it into town. Then Clarence was buried in a pine box amid the pecan trees, & the only white outside the community to come to the funeral was Rosalyn (Mrs. Jimmy) Carter, who brought a roast turkey. (Plains is seven miles from Americus.)....Not long thereafter, Loree & I & Florence (the widow Jordan), in the Jordan home, drank the last bottle of scuppernong wine Clarence had made.

But the radical prayer-witness of Clarence & Florence did not end with his death. Millard & Linda Fuller, converts to their vision of radical change through prayer-filled action, took over, & soon the world began to become aware of the primary emergent, **Habitat for Humanity**, the "sweat-equity" movement for low-cost housing now established in scores of nations. After Clarence's death, the community was much in prayer for guidance. On one occasion, Loree & I in the Fuller's home were on our knees with them as to whether they should try out first in Zaire their vision of low-cost housing for the poorest of the poor. They became convinced of Zaire, though none of the family was French-speaking. Of the early projects, I copied some slides so Loree could present the cause in churches. The Habitat for Humanity was the only board Jimmy Carter would serve on, & soon he was committing blocks of time to hands-on construction & reconstruction (the humblest work in the exPresidential history of the United States).

The next year, 1942, Gulf-Oil-heir Jn. Oliver Nelson, a Presbyterian minister, bought 42 mountainous acres outside of Bangor, PA, & began a Christian community for, as he said, "prayer & picketing," ie prayer & participation in social change, especially to improve the lot of the poor. His own home in **Kirkridge** (in Scottish, "churchridge") became a halfway house for exoffenders. He put \$1 million into an experimental school mixing the poor (eg, the daughter of my then-secretary, a black who could scarcely spell when I took her on) & the rich (eg, baseballer Jackie Robinson's daughter). He launched a chain of prayer-groups across America, tying them together with three commitments, viz to: (1) The Kirkridge Prayer, (2) Shared Intentions, & (3) the daily personal use of "Kirkridge Readings & Intentions," lectionary readings with gathering-guiding thoughts (the members of each group to gather weekly to share what discoveries, openings, guidance each had had during the daily personal prayer-sessions). (It was my joy to write many years of the "Readings & Intentions.") Here are the first two:

THE KIRKRIDGE PRAYER — Almighty Father, known in our silence, and entreated in our hunger for Thee, nourish us now with the common bread of Thy grace. Shape with Thy hands the witness of this quiet company, that our ministry may be Christ's own life in our day. Bestow Thy serenity and clean strength on each member of this circle, granting us honest work and steadfast friendship in Him. Deepen, O God, Thy intention for our life in Thee. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

SHARED INTENTIONS — This varied fellowship seeks a style-of-life with *daily*:

1. Openness to Scripture till word or verse speaks with power;
2. Intercessions by name, with thanks and praise;
3. Centering down in silence for at least minutes before God;
4. Seeking to act out Christian claims about justice, enemies, church, families, body-earth-air, intellect, our own affluence.

It is the aim of Kirkridge in everything to celebrate Christian faith in joy, without compulsion and without anxiety. Join us!

Kirkridge mothered several other innovative communities, of which I shall mention only **The Sycamore Community**, most of whose members through the years have had some relation with Penn State University. The "Ideas" section of the 14 Jan 91 NEWSWEEK is about one of those members, Rustum ("Rusty") Roy, who's shocked the scientific community by suggesting that we already have too many scientists (though he himself is a prestigious professor of physics), "welfare queens in white coats" grinding out endless unused books & articles. Instead, what we need is courses educating students in the technological choices they will face: "Only that which is connected to life will be remembered for life." The point I'm making about this science contrarian is something NEWSWEEK's writer was probably unaware of: In Rusty's life, in the life of the Sycamore Community, prayer is the root of radicality. (Think of how radical the Lord's Prayer is: "THY Kingdom come [over against our little kingdoms, including professional empires]....")....The Sycamore Community cared for Jn. Oliver ("Jack") Nelson in his dying days. Not long before he died, Jack & Rusty were participants in a retreat I led in a Catholic monastery outside of Elmira, NY. Both were radiant with the joy of the Lord & excited over the possibilities in "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof."

6 I can't resist a story & a quote. Fuller, a multimillionaire, in distress over the threatened breakdown of his marriage, on a friend's advice went to Koinonia to see Jordan. Jordan was late for the appointment, & Fuller jumped him for it. Jordan: "The community member who milks the cows is sick today, & I'm doing it. The cows can't wait, you can." Fuller stayed, gave up all his wealth, & worked with Clarence till Clarence's death. The quote is from the Feb/91 HABITAT WORLD, Clarence reflecting on his partnership ("Koinonia Partners") with Millard: "We have the deep feeling that modern man's greatest problems stem from his loss of any sense of meaningful participation with God in His purposes for mankind." (The sexist language is forgivable: I've never known less sexist men.)

7 At my suggestion, Harmon Bro sent you the story of something I consider newsworthy not because it's happening but because it's beginning to happen: a Protestant university (Boston U.'s School of Theology) "setting out to conduct serious research on prayer and related processes....a university-based center for advanced studies in spirituality....(with) a firm grounding in historic Christian spirituality (essentially prayer and the disciplined life), augmented by rigorous attention to World Religions as well as to depth psychology, the arts, and social service."

8 Now, you asked me to do a Thinksheet on "Dances With Wolves," which subsequently won seven Oscars. Besides proving the Western is not either dead, this film shows that spirituality is now very much alive in America. It's bathed in Amerind prayer; a "holy man" is the chief Amerind contact with the white protagonist. You'll have #2484 soon.

9 There's an elusive paradoxicality about prayer I've been trying to capture in a phrase, & think I just got it: **thisworldly otherworldliness**. Theologian Larry Greenfield's base is that religion is the experience of otherness, both common (viz, others) & special (ie, the Other). I may expand thus: As each is a world, our experience of another is experiencing another world--an experience which, in this sense, can accurately be called otherworldly; but in that the experience is in-&-through another, the experience is also thisworldly, here-&-now; &, in that experiencing the Other is also here-&-now (even when memory &/or anticipation), experiencing God is also thisworldly....What I'm resisting here is the common secular assumption that people who pray are, to the extent they do so, "out of it," distant from / neglectful of "the real world." I can't lodge this objection in the case of the Hindu who abandons his family & takes off for the wilderness forever: it's true. His prayer-life has been prefaced by a leaving of this life. But no such separation of the two worlds is possible in biblical, Jewish & Christian, religion.

Take the **radical Puritans**, eg. Why take them? Because the common secular canards against them can be summed up in the charge of otherworldliness. (Both Amos Wilder & Jaroslav Pelikan wrote books rejecting this charge against the NT.) The paradox is this: The more radical the Puritan, the greater the concern to make

a positive thisworldly difference, or at least the greater impact their lives made toward thisworldly improvement of the human condition....Two examples: (1) Rich. Baxter's THE SAINTS EVERLASTING REST, on the subject of heaven/hell (though he was only 30-31 when he wrote most of it, 4-5 earlier than the pub.d., 1650); & (2) Jn. Bunyan's THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS FROM THIS WORLD TO THAT WHICH IS TO COME (Pt.I, 1678, when age 50; Pt.II, 1684). (Personal note:  $\frac{1}{2}$ c. ago right now, I was teaching an intensive in this book, 3 3-hr. sessions 5 successive evenings. For me, age 23, it was a great joy with a great book & ca.40 eager folk decidedly committed to making a thisworldly difference on their way heavenward. And in addition to its religious, moral, & social-service values, this from THE OXFORD COMPANION TO ENG.LIT. on its literary values: "...the beauty and simplicity of its language..., the vividness and reality of the characterization, and the author's sense of humour and feeling for the world of nature."...It's rough on the rigid-formal religion that was hounding Bunyan, so in 1934 "religious considerations" caused it to be dropped from the highschool I was about to finish. Is public education with depths & guts, possible?....PROGRESS FROM... got corrupted later to PROGRESS IN....

I hope your article will remark this paradoxicality about biblical prayer, prayer in the Bible & prayer in the biblical spirit. We're now so inundated with Eastern religions--esp. Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism--that the secular notion of prayer as irrelevant to this life is being reinforced in the form of New Age privatized interiority.

In addition to "thisworldly otherworldliness," I'd like to offer a metaphor that just popped into my head: radical Puritanism prayed, preached, & lived **an interweave of the [two] worlds**. Not a blurring: Mysticism blurs the worlds, & radical Puritanism was in that sense antimystical. A story from yesterday, when I asked the acknowledged living authority on Cape Cod history the question whether the steeple clock in a certain church belonged, as I'd heard it did, to the town & not the church. "To the village," said she; "and the graveyard (note Puritan English, not [Greek-Latin] "cemetery") belongs to the town; the rest of what is called 'the church' belongs to the church, ie the congregation." By Mass. law, the citizenry could not form a village, then a town, without having (1) a [Congregational] minister on site & (2) a worshiping congregation formed: first things first. And of course only church members in good standing could vote in village & town elections. (The building's fabric was erected in AD 1797.)....The implicit separation of the two worlds led, on another plane, to the explicit "separation of church & state"--but that, as you well know, is a complicated story; & the so-called "separation" has hypertrophied into a separation of religion, & even morality, from the public-school NEA-monopoly system, an elision having a hollowing effect on the general culture, on "the American way of life."

10 You want to stick with prayer instead of getting into the jungle of **prayer and...** But that's tough to do. So many of the prayer-folks I've met are prayer-and-prayer-ers. ...Toyohiko Kagawa was prayer & cleaning up the slums of Japan....Frank Laubach was prayer & world literacy....Glenn Clark (Camps Farthest Out) was prayer & God's liberating power in & through groups (influenced somewhat by Frank Buckman's Oxford Group Movement, which tapered off into Moral Rearmament, which in turn became several other do-good organizations)....Dan Berrigan: prayer & peace....Dorothy Day: prayer & the poor....Black, Hispanic, Sinic, Amerind faces appear before my inner eye, each in prayer-& context....Morton Kelsey: prayer & therapy (not all of them primarily Jungian, as Kelsey is (he & Barbara now live in Gualala, Calif.)....Kelsey, an Episcopal priest who (as you know) taught theology at Notre Dame, has been influential--directly & indirectly--in the origins of some movements & centers, such as the Fellowship of St. Luke. A reporter of yours could experience the essence of Morton's message May 23-26 at Aqueduct Conference Center (Box 17299, Mount Carmel Church Rd., Chapel Hill, NC 27516-7299; ph. 919.933.5557): he & wife Barbara are leading a retreat on "The Bible, the Church & Dreams: How God Leads Us Through Dreams."....Because of his strong Jungian orientation (he was a student of CJ's), I've identified Morton as "prayer & therapy." Just as accurate would be "prayer & guidance." In the Bible, many divine-human conversations ("prayers" in the two-way, dialogical sense) are dreams prayerfully squeezed to extrude their meanings. "Prayers" as revelations (in dreams) + responses.

11 Which brings me to the comment that in all religions, response is the fundamental

action of prayer. Even the prayer of human initiative, the human-to-divine active mode, is subsumed under the divine initiative & is in this sense passive: "We love Him because He first loved us" (1Jn.4.19).

12 Which reminds me: In the Craigville Tabernacle I'm teaching a course this summer in "Great Prayers of the Bible." The Bible is prayer-loaded, of course; we'll be concentrating on these: (1) Hannah's (1Sam.1.11), (2) Solomon's (conversation in dream: 1K.3.5-9), (3) Mary's (The Magnificat: L.1.46-55), Jesus' (The Lord's Prayer: Mt.6.9-13; L.11.2-4).

13 Prayer is a vertical ellipse with "God" the upper focus & (what we used to call) "man" the lower: **meditation** is a circle whose center is both the meditator & the rest of the universe & metauniverse. Of the former, the metaphysics is dialectical, Creator/creature: of the latter, monistic ("only" one reality; negatively put, "a-dv-aita," opposition to the former's conviction of ultimate/intimate duality).

So, literally read, your title--"Talking To/With God"--rules out all religions of discovery, of awareness, of "mindfulness" (a word we'll be hearing a lot more of, as it's the key to current Buddhist missionary activity in the West). But actually, the picture is not so clear. Seeker to Buddhist sage: "Where did earth & sky & sea come from?" Bs: "Where did your question come from?" While the force of the answer is to drive the seeker to monism, the fact that the scene is Q/A, a dialog, presses me to ask "Where did the dialog come from?" We are free to choose, as the better model of reality, the fact that that gnome is in narrative form (as I do) or the fact that Q/A is not actually Q/A but Q/Q, which always proves out to support advaita.

Even though in practice only religions of revelation--Judaism, Christianity, Islam--have prayer as an essential in praxis, in religions of meditation prayer exists in praxis even though not in logos: the theory rules out what most of the devotees actually do, viz experience devotion as conversational (with some of the 30,000 gods of Hinduism, or with Buddha as Amida, or [in Taoism] as li with ti, earth with heaven).

To transpose into a mode well developed in all religions, viz love: Is not the need to love there before the beloved appears? Indeed, could the beloved be seen as beloved did not the need to love precede: is not the need to love the eyes, the only eyes, for seeing the beloved? But if the beloved never appears, these eyes are as useless as the undeveloped eyes of fish who live their lives deeper than light ever reaches. Love is inherently dialectical, dialogical, conversational. Love is prayer, prayer is love.

There's a natural synergism between mysticism & science: both hate discontinuity. Mysticism needs continuity of feeling through meditation, science needs continuity of thinking through reflection. But the balancing synergism is that between prayer & science: the experience of the Holy as unidentifiable with "nature" desacralizes nature, freeing it from the taboos that to this day constrict living stoneagers from progressing beyond surface manipulations of nature (a fact that deludes many into thinking them, eg the "Native Americans," more spiritual), & thus freeing human curiosity to explore nature without fear of ontic retaliation.

Let's use these abstracts, "monism" (for meditation) & "dualism" (for prayer). In popular parlance one hears the phrase "prayer & meditation," meaning communion with God & reflection on God, God's works, oneself, one's relationships, etc. Since our culture is dualistic, in this phrase "prayer" is the controlword. But the same phrase, in monistic situations (including New Age conversations), has "meditation" as the controlword; indeed, prayer means only an earlier, less "evolved" praxis on the path of spiritual development (usu., among New Agers, called "the path of enlightenment," enlightenment's ultimate meaning being deliverance from advaita, including deliverance from prayer: meditation, here, is an **enemy** of prayer).

Theoretically, there's less animosity on the part of dualism toward monism, for dualism incorporates prayer-meditation-CONTEMPLATION (the beatific vision, the ecstasy of love's transcendence of dualism, what Orthodoxy calls "theo·sis," participating "in the divine nature" [2P.1.4]). In liberal religion, both Jewish & Christian, the animosity is repressed, chiefly by generosity toward a minority opinion. But the situation is changing. Monism is steeply on the increase, & claiming that it's more scientific (a claim made by a number of Easterners as early as the 1893 Chicago World's



Parliament of Religions). But there are other reasons the animosity is less. In actual fact, dualism (the West) has been more friendly to science. The evolution controversy arose because of an unnecessarily antidualist reading of evolution, a reading Darwin at first rejected. Theism soon opened its mouth wide enough to swallow evolution. First we had "theistic evolution," then (Henry Nelson Wieman, a favorite teacher of mine) "naturalistic theism," then "process theology" (a base some theologians are using for a rapprochement with Buddhism, as prayer praxis [eg, Thos. Merton] is another).

I hope you don't think I've wandered away from what you asked my help on. What I'm saying to you in this § is that your article should somehow attack the public East/West blend of prayer/meditation: state not the animosity but the enmity. Tough to manage: so many readers will want to jump off your train. How can you remove the confusion without sounding partisan? By (I think!) explaining upfront that the article is about prayer & NOT meditation.

14 Prayer & science, again: Gerald Heard, with whom I spent an intensive week in 1952, was for twenty years the science director of the BBC. After WWII, concluding that a profounder understanding must come upon the West if we were to survive, he spent a decade wandering the world studying prayer, without which (to trope Emerson) science would be in the saddle, "riding men." TRAINING IN THE LIFE OF PRAYER, I & II; PREFACE TO PRAYER; & many more books & pamphlets emerged from his commitment, data-gathering, reflection, & both corporate & personal prayer experience. Nobody quite like that on the scene at the moment, so far as I know. Rusty Roy (Penn State) is close, & may know some others. (Gerald's final residence was with Aldous Huxley in Calif., where both died anticipating better than BRAVE NEW WORLD.)

15 The human brain is as atheist as a computer, though the human mind is not. In the "modern" period, the triumphs of homo faber's data-processing brain have obscured the mysterious tangency of our minds to brain-impenetrable conundrums, profundities, ecstasies, incommensurables, complexities, unconfined, ambiguities. We are now entering a new spiritual age at least in the negative sense of our being increasingly aware of the bitter fruits of personal, corporate, cultural, national-multi-national hubris. Life has humiliated us, opening us to a maturer humility which can be for us a gate of new life; & prayer is both the yearning & the energy to pass through that gate. For while we can make a mess on our own, prayer praxis surrenders the false "self-esteem" that we can make it on our own. (Why is the brain atheist? Prayer answers, "Because we need decisional distance from God: we could not choose to love God if we had not the possibility of not loving Him. It's the distance between humanity & the rest of nature, & between love & rape. And it's what 'the Fall' points to.")

In a remarkable U. of Chicago Bond Chapel sermon (Winter/91 CRITERION), Ian B. Oliver presents the stupid adventures of a divinity-school graduate who went forth into the real world as a "soldier of ambiguity fighting against the illusions of certainty." Repeatedly, those disappointed with his ministry ask, "Why have you not taught us about God and life?" Angrily, he passes the question to his divinity school, which thus defends itself: "I did not teach you about God and life because you did not ask": "you were more interested in debunking...than in serving." Otherwise you'd have "realized the ambiguity of ambiguity. I never taught you to make ambiguity your God; I taught you reason to help you understand your God, and ambiguity to tame your own desire to be God." There are music critics who "cannot play a note," and there are artists "whose criticism is in their performance": it's not my fault that you came to divinity school to become the former....Then the student realized that "his crusade of ambiguity was based on the false premise" that people go wrong & do wrong because of "ignorance or self-delusion" rather than because of "a basic hunger for even a brief glimpse of what the ultimacy of immortality or wholeness might be [underlining mine]. In their inarticulate fumbling for that glimpse, that moment of participation, people often choose badly among the thousands of bad choices their world offers."

In this light, prayer is "The soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed, / the motion of a hidden fire within the human breast." Throw anything less than God--any mere creature--into that "hidden fire" & it is consumed, leaving at best a

satisfied dissatisfaction. To your readers, your article will seem real if it touches in them this inmost place of longing, where God's Spirit yearns with us "in groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8.26 TEV).

16 Prayer is **creative co-dependency**, self-chosen liberation from independence. Addiction is the good news that independence is bad. But the Enlightenment-fostered spirit of independence hates that first of the confessions in the 12-step antiaddiction programs. That spirit wants nothing to do with God, with "a Higher Power," & thus nothing to do with prayer. (Atheist versions of the 12-step groups will remain only curiosities.) The various going paradigms of self-salvation (eg, the popular television Jn. Bradshaw's cognitive therapy of freeing "your inner child") do provide, as cognitive therapy, some insight into what our divinity-school graduate called "ignorance and self-delusion," but they do not touch that "basic hunger"--yet, in overclaiming for themselves, they are only so many forms of the Fall, processes of self-delusion.

Previously I indicated the **social** radicality of prayer. Here I'm closer to the bone: prayer radically rejects its rivals in the **personal**, inner world.

17 What gets our attention gets us. A man who thinks much of, & about, his wife will often start sentences with "My wife...." Persons of prayer--who think much of, & about, God, will often start sentences with "God...." I blush a little to offer, as example, this letter from CCT 2Apr91. Note the essential **radicality**. (1) I'm confessing not only the sin of everybody who disagrees with me, but also my own. (2) God is the deliverer from ideology. (3) God forbids us to dissociate ourselves from any sufferers (cf. Lincoln on the defeated South). (4) The pray-er denies that "God's will" comes prepackaged: rather, God's will is to be found (Albert Schweitzer) "in walking [& talking] with Him." (5) You can see behind my letter a disgust with those massed clerics who paraded around the White House, pre-Jan.16, with their "NO WAR!" placards. (6) "Values" are no substitute for prayer. But isn't "peace" a value? No, an evil; at least, that's what it was when I told FDR not to provide Britain with destroyers to put a dent in Hitler's submarine fleet which at the time was sinking most--most!--Atlantic shipping. (7) As the practice of the primacy of the divine-human conversation, prayer provides freedom from the temptation to take power more seriously than love--ie, to take the political as primary (in the range from the 100% American to the 100% America-basher). (8) In every variation of the human condition & confusion, prayer is the practice of reminding oneself where the Center is, "the Stillpoint of the whirling world." "You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust'" (Ps.91.1): a quiet inner joy reduces the weight of the world on the soul, relativizing opinion (one's own as well as others') & thus providing inward hedges against both fanaticism & indifference.

Prayer in itself, however, confers few of these benefits. Who can forget Eisenhower's banal comment that "it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you practice it"? Au contraire, a prayer's **quality** cannot rise higher than the quality of the deity addressed. That's the secondary reciprocity: the primary one is that between pray-ers' own human quality & the quality they believe-perceive in their deity ("God" cannot rise above the devo-

## Neither pacifist nor militarist be

God is with all sufferers but not ideologues. But a letter in the March 21 Cape Cod Times says of the war, "Let's hope that in the future we follow God's will."

I, too, pray and hope that we do, but -- unlike the letter writer -- I can't know ahead of time whether I'll be supporting peace or war.

Maybe I'll be saying "Give peace a chance," though I'm no pacifist. Maybe I'll be saying "Give war a chance," though I'm no militarist.

Do I think the U.S. and the U.N. gave peace enough chance? I do. Saddam the imperial dreamer had put \$50 billion into his military machine and he wasn't about to give peace a chance, any more than Hitler was in 1938.

I've a confession to make. When Hitler came to power and armed Germany to the teeth, I wasn't willing to give war a chance. I thought peace was good; but the reality was the war was good and peace was evil.

To be specific: Each day I read my diary of a half-century ago, and this is what I was ashamed to encounter under Feb. 27, 1941, more than nine months before Pearl Harbor: "I wrote President Roosevelt and my three (federal) legislators my opposition to the Lend-Lease (or, Lend-Lease) Bill, as tantamount to a declaration of war. (See letter file.)"

I didn't "see letter file." I'm embarrassed and penitent enough without doing that.

WILLIS ELLIOTT  
Craigville

tees' character)....All this is why "God in the Bible" is such a protean phrase. Instead of being an "objective" statement about the nature of God (oxymoron indeed!), the Bible is a rich compost pile of stories & sayings about God-as-experienced; & prayer is the heart of God-experiencing.

18 Prayer is to be distinguished both from psychic influence & from magic, both of which center in the self (individual or communal) rather than in the Other, in God.... **Psychic influence**, indeed the whole ESP field, is real, & much of ESP research-time goes to separating the real from the unwitting illusional & from the fraudulent. Unfortunately, anxiety to sell prayer to oneself, the church, & the general public leads some otherwise honest folk to claim that prayer is nothing more than the highest form of mind over matter....which slides easily into the **magical** notion that the more mind (the more people concentrate, & the more the people who are concentrating), the more power over matter. "Prayer changes things" as the old saw has it; & the more prayer, the more things change. Magic is a self-propelled effort to manipulate supernatural powers ("energies," as they're called by New Agers, who aren't, but consider themselves too sophisticated to be, free from superstition).

Again, this is a problem for your article. How do you disabuse your readers of their false, aberrant notions of what "prayer" is? And again, as you'd expect, I have the answer: tell 'em you're not including psychic influence & magic. How? You're the authority on that....The bottom line is that in the Bible, OT & NT, prayer is personal-&-communal dealing with, relating to, a personal God, with all the complexities of human interrelationships "& (as Mad.Av. says) more." Both psychic influence & magic fail of being prayer by virtue of their being personal only in here, not out there at the other end of the action. Which leads to my next point:

19 Prayer seems unreal to many because they've never experienced God as Somebody, as the Person at the other end of the cosmic-historical-personal telephone. Rightly, many spiritual traditions compare prayerlessness to (1) being asleep (Eph.5.14) & (2) never having been sexually awakened. Here one's metaphysics is the mirror of one's praxis: prayerlessness "proves" God, if a god exists, is impersonal, just as prayer "proves" that God is personal. How natural, then, that both theistic & atheistic existentialism stem from Kierkegaard, who says (though in elegant Danish) "You pays your money & you takes your choice." In THE DIARY OF A SEDUCER, he says something like that anybody, simply by treating other people impersonally, can prove that persons (including oneself!) do not exist.\* Sadly, falsely, the Enlightenment claimed to have cracked this nut. That we cannot crack it is a fact, a mercy, more a joy than a sadness, & an invincible invitation to treat one another kindly (as God in Christ treats us)...\*As Buber said less than a century later (ICH UND DU, 1923 addresses to publicschool teachers), you can "It" people or "Thou" them. So with how you treat God. Such was Abraham's (Gn.18.23ff) & Moses' (Ex.32.7ff) praying that the conversational (even the argumentative!) mode was required to represent it--& so with most of the succeeding major biblical personalities. Which brings me to....

18 ....this thing of "**self-esteem**." Biblically, it doesn't come from taking a good look at yourself & concluding that you're basically a decent sort, if not even a bit more. When you take a look at yourself in the light of the biblical God, it ruins whatever self-regard you've managed to rig up for yourself: "I'm ashamed...and repent" (Job 42.6), just the self-estimate God has been waiting for so as to be free to say, "Now I esteem you, & set you free to esteem yourself & others IN ME." When God's side of prayer redeems Job from thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think, God sees to it that Job does not think of himself more lowly than he ought to think....Detroit is setting up two K-12 schools to teach the Bible's "values" but not its religion. It'll no more work than you can have a one-way phonecall, for the Bible's values are prayer-forged; & any self-esteem anybody can manage without God is just one more form of the Fall....I fear I insult you by stating my point: The aims of biblical religion & of our publicschool system are not just different, they hate each other. Self-esteem is a secular alternative to holiness. How is that going to get said in your article? (SLM are the Semitic [Hebrew & Arabic] radicals [consonants] meaning, roughly, "peace & prosperity" through obedience or submission (Arabic, "Islam"!)) to God. In Judaism, Christianity, & Islam, this obedience or submission in its full sense is the organ of spiritual knowledge & the path of life.)



19 Adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, & praise are biblical religion's **prayer-actions**. Whatever effects prayers have "out there," in here--in the pray-ers' hearts & lives--the five actions produce five corresponding moods, which feed five corresponding attitudes, which predispose or tilt the pray-ers to behave in certain ways. We become like those we love, & prayer--as paying attention to the One we love--is the process of becoming saints (ie, participating in the holiness of Him who says "Be holy, for I am holy").... As for "out there" effects:

(1) Prayer is the roots of the spiritual life, & praying is feeding the roots (to be done, says Jesus, "in secret" [as the roots are invisible]). The spiritual life is the "out there" of which prayer is, in our metaphor, the "down there."

(2) The invisible part of the prayer iceberg is prayer's unconscious influence. The general truth is that most of the beneficence (the good-doing) of our lives is unintended, ie is not from deliberate-conscious benevolence (good-willing). "Does God answer prayer?" Yes, & prayerlessness, too. Prayer's impress on our moods-attitudes-actions is God in action even more in our unconscious than in our conscious influence for good; & in the same dynamic, God is answering in the good that's not done when our lives are not prayer-shaped. (This leads into rewards/punishments, heaven/hell.)

(3) But "Did God answer your prayer?" usually means "Did you get what you wanted for yourself [petition], or another [intercession]?" The answer may be "Yes" or "Not what was wanted, but what was needed" or "I don't know yet" or "No, for some reason I don't know [& I don't need to, or & it perplexes me, or & it distresses me--but I trust God, who knows what's needed beyond my knowing]." What's essential to grasp here is that biblical praying is more a process of relating than a method of obtaining, though the Lord's Prayer encompasses both. A cost-accounting mentality about prayer is as destructive as the question, often the first in the slide toward divorce, "What am I getting out of this marriage?" If the petitional-intercessional efficacy of prayer is the dominant question, if prayer is viewed more as transactional than as relational, the point & power of prayer are missed. But this missing is so common as to be, I think, the major obstacle to prayer.... Again, I'm throwing out suggestions as to what true prayer is NOT, for your article's clarity depends on your stating that.

(4) Intercession--God-facing concern for others--develops biblically into "out there" actions on behalf of others: solidarity with sufferers as (1) vicarious suffering (the Servant Poems of Isaiah, Jesus as the Lamb of God) & (2) actions with sufferers toward social change. Karl Marx's gymnasium graduation thesis was on John 17, Jesus' prayer for others: Marxism is a prayer-&-philosophy product, the philosophy part tragically flawed; Marxism is compassion gone haywire through the brain.

20 Prayer & **Bible study** are reciprocal. When (twice) the Jews lost their temple, sacrifice collapsed into prayer; when they lost their independence, their "holy land" collapsed into their "holy book." The two losses simplified religion into the two fundamental liturgical actions of synagogue & church, viz Prayer & Scripture..... While your article will emphasis private prayer, the corporate context & the reciprocal relation with corporate-group-personal Bible study should be noted. One more attack on the current privatized, egocentric notions about prayer.

21 Monotheistic, biblical prayer is inescapably **ecumenical**: one God, one world, one yearning that the world be one & every soul at-one with God. Inescapable also, though little noticed till of late, is that this prayer-ecumenical spirit includes the nonhuman creation: biblical prayer supports our growing **ecological** concern. We are stewards of the earth for its Owner, the One with whom we commune in prayer.... The NT easily appropriates Third Isaiah's future temple as "a house of prayer for the people of all nations" (Is.56.7).

22 Thoughtful prayer ministers to creative **humility**, for we discover that "we do not know how we ought to pray" (Ro.8.26); but simultaneously we discover that help is near: (1) The Holy Spirit makes audible God's side of the conversation as we regularly expose ourselves to the Bible (Jn. Calvin's *testimonium spiritus sancti internum*: the Protestant compensation for the loss of the Roman Catholic magisterium & hierarchy for biblical interpretation); (2) The indwelling Spirit is moderator in the internal conversation between the heart & the Holy (v.27); (3) The glorified Christ intercedes for us (v.34, but esp. Heb.); & (4) The prayer-model Jesus gave Christians perpetually applies to our prayers "Not my will but Yours be done."

23 Organizations outside church & synagogue are becoming unembarrassed about asking for prayer & even suggesting a prayer (as the American Cancer Society's "A Prayer for the Conquest of Cancer")....The instruction "Pray without ceasing [or, at all times]" is less a counsel of perfection than it seems: rather, habitual conversation with God can & should be a tonic (in both senses) running through life. I think of radiant Helen Keller the moment she said to me, "God is the Light in my darkness, the Voice in my silence."....As nothing else can, real prayer satisfies the human **hunger for majesty**. At Cape Canaveral I sat before a five-story-high screen & watched a take-off, but that was a pale outward majesty such as Gene Roddenberry capitalized on in his "Star Trek" series & films. In the current issue of THE HUMANIST, he repeatedly expresses perplexity over the survival of prayer, of faith in & communion with Somebody Out There In Here. For his own message is (to use a Jn. Ciardi poem) "Man can." Secular magazines deal easily with visibles, Something Out There, uncomfortably with invisibles. But your article includes something visible, viz millions of people "out there" praying. It's a brow-frowner to those who believe there's nobody out there, that prayer is at best soliloquy & at worst delusional conversation....Noriega is now said to have escaped prison--in spirit, not in body--by the only truly **limits-defying** activity, viz prayer. Prayer is back partly because of humanity's crescendoing experience of limits. Pathological efforts to transcend limits--by lust, greed, power--are themselves crashing into limits. We are being forced to confess that the dream of radical individualism is false: we are not even human without the other (& the Other, I must add). And the illusion of unlimited earth-resources has been punctured as (eg) 600 Kuwaiti oilwells burn....Prayer is the direct expression of the highest **passion**, & that passion is stirring once again. Eg, in PBS programming; in academic forums with "Beyond" in their themes; in the pervasive use of "spirituality."....When I started this letter, I thought I'd be listing resources, retreat centers, networks, quotes, vignettes of prayer-personalities. I've done a little of that, but found myself in a meditative mood & so have produced ramblings I hope you'll not find entirely useless.

Grace & peace, *Willis*