

# "ALL ALONE BY THE TELEPHONE"?

THE FAITH / PRAYER CONNECTION ----- Elliott #1777

As tools are extensions of our powers, they mirror those powers. This thinksheet meditates on one of those mirrorings, viz., from telephone to spirituality.

1. I can hear my parents singing the 1920s pop song whose title is this thinksheet's first line. It's a white-blues moan of self-pity by a lovelorn girl/woman (I take no chances: I think it was a girl, but "feminist language" has confused me as to what "a girl" means these days). Those days, the romance of railroad/telephone went together --the former far-distancing your body, the latter doing the same for your voice. (My use of "far" here is German, which says "far-speaker" for telephone and "far-seer" for television--Germanic *Fern* instead of Greek *tele*-). Tele-/phone-vision is metaphoric for **God as distant, yet near by faith/prayer.**
2. Ma Bell's "Reach out and touch some one" exploits the current touch-hug awareness, as does Henri Nouwen's popular REACHING OUT. As for culture-analysis, note that the power of this slogan/verb derives from the same source as does the power of the 1920s pop tune: the **loneliness** of so-called "modern man," in relation to which the phone is a salvific symbol. Instance:
3. Marilyn Monroe's dead body was right by her phone, as was her empty pillbottle. Her corpse was found in between the latter (symbol of death) and the former (symbol of life). See what a poet can make of such a situation: here's some of Ernesto Cardenal's *Oración por Marilyn Monroe*: "Lord, ...answer Thou the telephone!" (*Señor...Contessa Tú el teléfono!*) Here's the whole, so you can feel the pathos and pleading, with the vague but sure feeling that Marilyn is still not too far to phone God: "Lord, whoever it was that she was going to call, she did not call (perhaps it was no one, perhaps it was Somebody whose name is not in the Los Angeles telephone directory) answer Thou the telephone!" (Is.65.24: "Before they call, I will answer....")
4. The "E.T." craze has its power root in (1) E.T.'s **lostness-loneliness-doomedness**, the inner condition of (a) an abandoned child and (b) modern man: theatergoers could "identify" with him; and (2) E.T.'s triple **resurrection**: (a) his discovery of the phone, and adaptation of junk so "E.T. phone home" (incorporating the learning of English as a resurrection from inability to communicate by language with earthlings); (b) his bodily resurrection out of the coffin; and (c) the return, to get him, of the spaceship that had unwittingly abandoned him: he got "saved"; and (3) he was, as Christ figure, an earth-**savior** from heaven, primarily for Elliott, who loved him and struggled to communicate with him. Of recent films, "E.T." is best for exhibiting what in this thinksheet's title is called "the faith/prayer connection."
5. The faith/prayer connection can be broken from either side in both senses: (1) Both we and God can "hang up," and the Bible says both do; and (2) Faith may fail prayer, or vice versa. I address only the fourth: prayer fails faith when prayer is misunderstood/abused. E.g., prayer is abused when one gets an answer one refuses to live--as in the embarrassingly frequent joke (when the Voice said "Let go!" to the cliff-hanging man), "Is anybody ELSE up there?" Prayer and faith are **robust or effete** together. For as prayer is the heart toward God, faith is the mind toward God. Pathologies here: (1) **Dogma** is the pathology of faith, the mind trying to take over also the heart's business; (2) **Credulity** is the pathology of prayer, the heart trying to take over also the mind's business. Conclusion: These two diseases should be treated together, as they're symbiotic.
6. Alexis deTocqueville in the 1830s saw Americans, despite traditional religiousness, as given over to the religion of **the individual**, and predicted horrors to come: (1) solipsism, nothing else--even God--considered as quite so real as one's own life; (2) introversion, the outer "I" seeming to be not as real as the inner "I"; (3) consequence #1: **weakened ability to make and keep commitments**; (2) consequence #2: **loneliness**, the inner signal (corresponding to physical pain the body) of the pathology of hyperindividualism. Christmas '83 is less than a week away, and already the suicide rate is up: Christmas, the year's supreme convergence of commitments, heightens psychic pain in the hyperindividuated. The phone doesn't ring at any end; nothing is "born."