

To Pray



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Cover: Betende Hände (PrayingHands) c. 1505
Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)
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Most of us do not expect the Lord to show up and talk to us at the foot of our bed or along side us while we are sitting in our favorite chair. However, I'm not saying that it's an impossibility. We do carry on a dialogue with him as if he were there. We imagine him as we would many other persons whom we have never met personally, except under the accidents of bread and wine, but know intimately. We "see" him on the Shores of Galilee and in the Courts of the Temple in Jerusalem. He speaks to us through the Gospels, as though we were part of the crowd that followed him around.

The case of the Father is a different story. We will see The Father, but not in this cosmological dimension; that is, if our lives have been lived in a state of grace, with love. We'll have to wait for that hour, at his discretion. Since life is a gift of the Spirit, we have *life* in the Spirit from the first moment of our conception. It is only Jesus we can picture historically in this Unified Triad.

Currently, there are many conversations going on in the world of science regarding the origin of life on earth. The more secular approach contends that, basically, life emerged from chemistry under just the right conditions. Still, "there is no current scientific consensus to support that claim. The most accepted scientific models build on the following observations:

- The Miller–Urey experiment, and the work of Sidney Fox, show that conditions on the primitive Earth favored chemical reactions that synthesize amino acids and other organic compounds from inorganic precursors.
- Phospholipids spontaneously form lipid bilayers, the basic structure of a cell membrane.

Living organisms synthesize proteins, which are polymers of amino acids using instructions encoded by deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Protein synthesis entails intermediary ribonucleic acid (RNA) polymers. One possibility for how life began is that genes originated first, followed by proteins; the alternative being that proteins came first and then genes.

However, since genes and proteins are both required to produce the other, the problem of considering which came first is like that of the chicken or the egg. Most scientists have adopted the hypothesis that because of this, it is unlikely that genes and proteins arose independently”.⁽¹⁾ Whether you totally understand the details of this clip or not; it seems to be saying that the origin of life on earth is still a bit of mystery. At least we need to trust the assumption that life on our planet began in bacterial form about 13.7 billion years ago; exactly how still remains to be seen. That leaves the 10.2 billion years in between from the start of everything (The Big Bang,) to the dawn of primitive life: another million or so years to the genus Homo, then to 200k years ago for Homo Sapiens. I really have no problem accepting the scientific findings that life, as we

know it, “emerged” from the single celled organisms still found in the world. For me, life, or spirit was the Creator’s addition to the chemistry. Spirit came before matter, not the other way around. Since Eukaryotic cells were not much interested in prayer, we will only concern ourselves with post-modern human beings with whom we are more familiar.

The Christian world concedes that the dynamic of creation is the power of the uncreated Father, known through the Son, in the Spirit; the One Almighty God we worship. This is the crucial message delivered by the Incarnation through Mary about two thousand years ago. God became a fact of life in “Christ with us”– for the express purpose of saving us from the negative aspects of being– using the curative power of love. Man was given direct contact with the Father in Jesus through the Spirit. Man’s imaginary gods, the idols of archaic times, were no longer a factor in his life, even though there are still remnants of it in the human community. Worship no longer required blood sacrifice , etc.; the final sacrifice was made on the Cross of Calvary. The love of God for mankind was given by example at the Resurrection; death was conquered; infinity was defined, and the choice for eternal life was offered in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Human nature and Divine nature were joined in Christ. An Apostolic mission was made perfectly clear to his small cult of followers.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in

the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”.(2)

Although this mission, though magnificent, is still incomplete, it is a genuine work in progress, hampered, as always, by thoughtless, mistaken human beings either from ignorance or by those harboring ill will both inside and outside of present religious edifices. Par for the course, in my opinion. The scientific, empirical method, to my knowledge, has never proven Creation as wrong headed. The men and women who are trying to do this are always deep in the mathematical weeds: not wrong, just inconclusiveness parading as certainty. Most answers come out as infinity and are presumed correct.

“Internal monologue, also known as an inner voice, internal speech, or verbal stream of consciousness is silently thinking with words and pictures in every human being. It refers to the semi-constant internal monologue one has with oneself on a conscious or semi-conscious level. Much of what people consciously report "thinking about" may be thought of as a conversation with oneself. Some of this can be considered as speech rehearsal.”(3)

You don't have to be a psychologist to understand that there is also an internal “dialogue” going on in our heads. It may be a little different in different people, but when we're reasoning or deliberating, we are asking all kinds of questions of the “I” and

the “me” until we are *willing* to make a decision to take action, or to defer action i.e., putting something off. We reach into our memory, consult our knowledge, hem and haw about propriety, assert our moral stance... we may even bring our whole being to bear: all in the mental process of coming to a right and hopefully true and beneficial decision for ourselves and others. In the main, we do this with ease provided the subject matter is not crucial or critical. If otherwise, the internal back and forth in both words and pictures can produce reactions in highly emotional ways. We are not zombies, we are responsible for what we do resulting from what we think to be *right* in our formed consciences. Of course there is always a chance that for one reason or another our conscience may be in error.

An erroneous conscience may have been programmed to accept negativity rather than the *intrinsic* good placed in every human heart. We can be taught that what is wrong is right in a relative world where there is a well developed moral equivalency. The Truth per se cannot be, in certain cases, untrue. It is in fact only *the* truth in which we human beings are free.

Appealing to that intrinsic good which most believers in God recognize is within them, is the rudimentary notion leading to the concept of prayer. Our private conversations with our selves can in many ways be similar to our truth-filled, heartfelt conversations with the Father, Jesus or the Spirit of God within us. The simple prerequisite is that the personal God we believe in and trust in hears our prayers. If one understands that the

trine God is ubiquitous in a pan-en-theistic way , and Jesus instructs us to pray, there can be no reason to think we are not being heard and merely talking to the walls.

“William James (1890) proposed a distinction between the I and the Me, which, according to Morris Rosenberg, is a classic distinction in the psychology of the self. According to James the “I” is equated with the “self-as-knower” and has three features: continuity, distinctness, and volition. The continuity of the self-as-knower is expressed in a sense of personal identity, that is, a sense of sameness through time. A feeling of distinctness from others, or individuality, is also characteristic of the self-as-knower. Finally, a sense of personal volition is reflected in the continuous appropriation and rejection of thoughts by which the self-as-knower manifests itself as an active processor of experience.

Of particular relevance to DST is James's view that the Me, equated with the self-as-known, is composed of the empirical elements considered as belonging to oneself. James was aware that there is a gradual transition between Me and mine and concluded that the empirical self is composed of all that the person can call his or her own, ‘not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account.’ According to this view, people and things in the environment belong to the self, as far as they are felt as ‘mine’. This means that not only ‘my mother’ belongs to the self but even ‘my enemy.’ In this

way, James proposed a view in which the self is ‘extended’ to the environment. This proposal contrasts with a Cartesian view of the self which is based on a dualistic conception, not only between self and body but also between self and other. With his conception of the extended self, that defined as going beyond the skin, James has paved the way for later theoretical developments in which other people and groups, defined as ‘mine’ are part of a dynamic multi-voiced self.”(6)

Let’s try to put this in less formal terms as “we” (both the I and the me) understand it. Taking our cue from Professor James: The “I” in us is the actor, (the subject)— the “me,” is the acted-upon (the object). It’s quite easy, I think, to see the distinction. When they, (whoever they are) diss *me*, the “I” responds to the situation. “I” decide whether “poor me” deserves to be dissed or not. The aggressive (I) protects the defensive (me). “Have mercy on *me* Lord, and *I* will do your will;” a bit bizarre, but it seems to work as the “dialogical-self”.

“Prayer is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort. The great figures of prayer of the Old Covenant before Christ, as well as the Mother of God, the saints, and he himself, all teach us this: prayer is a battle. Against whom? Against ourselves and against the wiles of the “tempter” who does all he can to turn us away from prayer, away from union with God. We pray as we live, because we live as we pray. If we do not want to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ, neither can we pray habitually

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in his name. The “spiritual battle” of the Christian’s new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer”.(4)

Almost every thought, word, and deed honestly directed to God, in my opinion is a prayer. A prayer can be mis-directed if it’s dishonest. A prayer can be dishonest in exactly the same way a person to person conversation can. Hubris, exaggeration, false promises, etc., are all in play. Directing our prayer to the Father, or the Son or the Spirit is our prayer to the One God of all creation who knows us better than we know our selves. For example, Jesus prayed to his Father and our Father with these words:

*Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give [us] this day [our] daily bread,
and forgive [us] [our] trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against [us],
and lead [us] not into temptation,
but deliver [us] from evil.(5)*

I have bracketed the us’s and the our’s in Jesus’ prayer because prayer is generally a communal enterprise, but it also expresses [our] i.e., the “I” and the “me” of a petitioning or thankful self; for instance, “(I) thank you Lord for (my) understanding of such and such.

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When Jesus said that no one can come to the Father except through him, he was not making himself exclusive of the Father, he was clearly stating that only *through him* the Father is known in human terms. When he told us to ask for anything in his name, he was proclaiming the Trinity. It was the power of the Father working in the man Jesus enabling the miraculous, The meaning in his human nature was to do the will of the Father who sent him. The meaning in his divine nature was the one time expiation of the transgressions against the Triune God for all time. He is the way, the truth, and the life which we are invited to follow. The recognition of the super-natural objective of the life of man is found in Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior of the world, who becomes the true purpose of human existence. He is God with us now and forever.

If we happen to be graced enough to pray, and our prayers are offered in humility— and we are convinced that God hears us, how do we know our prayers will be answered?

If our effort is made in true humility, why should we expect an answer? If we are to follow Jesus, aren't we simply subject to the will of the Father just as he was on earth? Still, our prayers are answered as Jesus promised and exemplified, but not always in ways we expect. Prayers of petition should not be offered simply to test God's response. (7)

So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For

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everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!(8)

It is made perfectly clear in these words of Jesus that we are indeed children of God. A good parent knows very well how important love is: and not to indiscriminately lavish too much on his or her children. An over abundance of material goods and too much doting and coddling can be very detrimental. However, to treat them as inhuman, superfluous or “unwanted,” kills the innocent human spirit. In *Roe v Wade*, to murder them outright, has been one of the greatest evils of cultural relativism in the history of human civilization. No cooperative creation of man, woman and God can be a mistake. The procreative act is not a sport, it is the ultimate expression in human nature of unselfish love.

We are all beggars on this doorstep of God. To remain in the Spirit of Love for God and love and respect for others others-without without exception, would be the most gratifying answer to all of our prayers.

*Stay awake and **pray** that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

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*O Mary conceived without sin, **pray** for us who have recourse to thee.*

*May the divine assistance remain with us always we **pray**, and may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.*

NOTES

1. Wikipedia, Life
2. Matt. 28: 18
3. Wikipedia, Internal Monologue
4. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2725
5. Matt. 6: 9-13
6. Wikipedia, Dialogical Self
7. Matt. 4: 7
8. Luke 11: 8