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INTERCESSORY PRAYER AND TELEPATHY

Vincent E. Eriksson

Is there a dimension of "telepathy" in intercessory prayer? This question may seem to some to be irreverent. To others, it may seem commonplace. To the first, I wish to say that I mean no irreverence. I rather hope to bring thinking and talking about prayer more into touch with some of our considerations about the spirit of persons. To the second, I apologize for being a novice, a stumbler even, in relation to the practice of intercessory prayer. I rejoice for those of more experience. But I wish to write for those whose prayer life has not kept up with their immersion in secular culture.

I make the suggestion that there may be a dimension of telepathy in intercessory prayer, not because of a particular interest in telepathy, but to make prayer more intelligible to some Christians. Hopefully they might be encouraged thereby to engage in more intercessory prayer. In my own thinking I wonder if "telepathy" is not really a part of an exchange of spiritual energy in the world -- an exchange which we as Christians, in our day-to-day lives, have largely abandoned. Our lives have become so dominated by a materialistic view of the universe that talk of spiritual energies doesn't fit.

What led me to ask the question was the problem, "Why is prayer *commanded* if our only communication in prayer is with God?" If God is all-powerful and all-knowing, why pray? Should we say that God foresaw all the intercessory prayer that would be made in all time and took it into account in his plans? That seems to make God into a calculating, non-loving God. Contrariwise, does prayer change God? If so, then God would seem to be finite. Or, does prayer merely change our attitude, but not anything outside of us, except as we put forth purely material efforts after our prayer. This would seem to make the command to pray for others foolish and empty!

In actual fact the above dilemma exists only because we have inherited the concept of God as "watchmaker" from 17th and 18th century philosophy. By regarding the universe as a machine, this view effectively restricted spiritual existence to God and to people. When we abandon the mechanistic view of the universe the everyday reasons for prayer become different.

It appears that popular culture is, to a great extent, abandoning the mechanistic view of the universe. Witness the high level of interest in everything from human consciousness to witchcraft that has developed in the last few years! The world seems to be abandoning the old mechanistic view, but it is seeking a

spiritualistic view *without* God. Christians, perhaps in opposition to occultism, seem to be retaining the mechanistic view - not necessarily in their religious thinking, but in their thinking about the world around them.

We need to look at the universe, not merely as a mechanism created by a remote God, but as *both* material and an abode of spirits--ours and others. Then intercessory prayers cease to be our trying to persuade God and become another way of working *beside* God in the struggle against evil. Could it be that intercessory prayer puts forth spiritual energy which helps in the struggle of the person for whom we pray? If so, then our prayers are not communication with God only but communication with other persons as well. Then we join with others in exerting our spiritual energy to help those for whom we pray (though in faith and humility, we ultimately entrust ourselves and others for whom we pray to God).

Those who are accustomed to group intercessory prayer may smile at this point. They have probably believed this for a long time. Again, forgive my novitiate!

For those who are not in this position, let me point to the Scriptures. There are some notable passages which suggest that prayer involved a direct spiritual struggle. In Daniel 10:12-14, for example, an angel tells Daniel that he was delayed twenty-one days because of conflict with a hostile angel (R.S.V. "prince") until helped by the archangel Michael. Another passage is Ephesians 6:12, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood..." etc. The vividness of the imagery about the armor of God in verses 13-17 may prevent us from seeing a real connection between verse 12 and verses 18 and 19. Then there is Jesus' word in Gethsemane, "Watch with me".

We have been told often that prayer is powerful. If there is a dimension of telepathy in intercessory prayer, then we might add, "How *dangerous* prayer is!"

How *dangerous*?? Yes. First of all, because we might erroneously think we can act in our own spiritual strength to do something to someone else. What an opening for idolatry of self! Secondly, how necessary to pray according to God's will and in Christ's way. We need then to pray for guidance also as we pray for another. Thirdly, we may be tempted to seek an alliance with the devil!

Some of the passages in the New Testament that speak of prayer were once puzzling to me. Now I find these passages awesome, even terrifying! How much more real the struggle, how much more urgency to pray, if we see this added dimension in intercessory prayer.