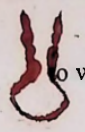


JML: Scuffling about, well, why doesn't God and the Devil send messages



to waking minds?

NM: I think they do all the time. Of course they do. I remember when I met my present wife, we've been together for thirty years, the first day I met her, the first moment I met her, she said "Hello" and I thought she had one of the nicest faces I'd ever seen. She was taller than me, which irritated my machismo a bit and I was about to say, "Boy, are you tall." On top of everything not only being taller than me, she was wearing three inch wedgies, and at that moment I felt a force at the back of my head pulling my head back and saying, "Get out of here, you ass." And I did. I just sort of nodded at her and I walked away. The reason could not have been simpler. As I got to know her over the years I realized that if I'd made that remark when we met we would have gone no further. She is sensitive to that sort of

off-putting remark. That would have been it. So, I really had the feeling

that that was not me. Someone was giving me a message. Ok, people have

that all the time, right or wrong. Of course God and the Devil communicate.

Very often when you're writing well you feel that you are not doing it

yourself, exactly, but doing it through a pipeline of unconsciousness and it's

all coming through in an agreeable fashion with a skill and style and

elegance that you don't possess yourself. So no, of course there is

communication. But I think what we would do well to recognize in these

matters is that the networks of communication are extremely scrambled.

One of the wars that goes on between God and the Devil is play with

communication. Go back to Kierkegaard. You never know. The moment

you are doing your most saintly you could be doing your most evil. The

moment you are doing the most evil you could, in fact, be serving God, and

totally mistaken that you are doing evil. In other words, what Kierkegaard

was working for is that we do not know our relation to God and the Devil.

We can hope and we can pray but that doesn't mean that we have it.

JML: You wrote in a letter recently that I read that you thought television

was not a medium of communication but a valve. And the valve opens...

NM: No, it opens for some and it closes for others.

JML: Speak to me about that. The valve idea. You talk about the Devil in getting through the valve.

NM: Well, there are certain mediocrities who succeed in television and many fine people who don't. It is significant about television that we don't have any truly superior people on television ever. It's very interesting that

way. For instance, you can't conceive of somebody like Edmund Wilson or Lionel Trilling ever having a show. In England I think it is somewhat better. But in America....

JML: There is Johnny Carson.

NM: And Carson was excellent at what he did but what he did was of the middle. I've felt for a long time that television was essentially the Devil's toy. Not God's mechanism for enriching us. Because of that, there is a valve that just makes some people look more interesting and squeezes others to look silly or shrill. And so forth. But this is just a supposition.

JML: No, it's a very good insight.

NM: Well, that's your opinion. (both laugh.)

JML: Does your belief in Karma have anything to do with your less than enthusiastic feelings about prayer?

NM: That is a good point. My feeling is that Karma takes care... Very often when people are praying their (*can't make out word. 'festeir???'*) is so fine, is so good is so pure. And if God could only realize what a fine creation he has in them, if God would only pay more attention to them, God would love them more. They pray to get God's love. They feel that they are entitled to it, that they deserve it. My attitude is that Karma takes care of all of that. If you live a life that is a little better one way or another, a little braver, a little more compassionate or responsible or whatever it is that is a positive guide that is not expected to such a degree, you'll be taken care of in your rebirth.

This assumes that a foul up in communication does not occur in reincarnation which I am not at all sure about. I think we're living in a very tight world, including reincarnation. Alright, let's not needle-nose this to death. My argument is that Karma is a substitute for prayer. A real and legitimate and profound substitute for prayer.

JML: The Holy Ghost for Christians is a force of love whose function, to put it boldly, is to act as a psychic bulldozer chopping through all the cosmic static to get the message of God's presence and love to Humans.

NM: If you have a feeling of grace, it is given to you by the Holy Ghost.

JML: If you feel like you've got a line open that's because the Holy Ghost is...

NM: For how long, how long?...

JML: And it's two ways too.

NM: What do you mean, two ways?

JML: One going up and one going down. Your prayer going up, and God's grace coming down. Perhaps I'm putting this crudely, but I wonder if you've ever thought about the Holy Ghost's role in prayer and the answer to prayers.

NM: Well, let me say one thing about prayer, given the many negative things I've said about it. I can see exceptional cases where a prayer is so

beautiful and comes out of such depth in a human and has such inner resonance that it reverberates in God's domain and attention is paid. But, I think such prayers are as rare as the work of a great artist.

JML: You've just defined the Holy Ghost.

NM: How have I defined it?

JML: That's what the Holy Ghost does is....

NM: No, but I'm saying this isn't (*something..can't get one word. Both are talking at the same time.*) the attention of the Holy Ghost. If the Holy Ghost is God's instrument for receiving the needs of people that the prayer is artful enough, simple enough, in that sense you cut across education. In other

words, you don't have to be an educated person to have a beautiful prayer.

A prayer comes out of the depths of your experience and has a fine balance of perception and passion and forgiveness and true human need. All of those elements form an exceptional unity. A small masterpiece. Yes, alright. If the Holy Ghost is God's instrument then the Holy Ghost would receive that prayer and call it to God's attention. I'm not saying that all prayer is ridiculous, I'm just saying, taken for granted, all you have to do is say to yourself, use P-R-A-Y-E-R (*spells it out*) and all will be fine.

JML: You are arguing that if prayer is to be efficacious or to be heard at all it has to be all of those things you said, whole, pure and free of cynicisms.

NM: And buried motive.

JML; And buried motive. And that's rare. That's a rare human endeavor.

NM: Yes, a rare human endeavor.

JML: Well, if you concede that the Holy Ghost is sort of flying around

listening and being open to that sort of purity...

NM: Let's not get into that too much.

JML: The saints also have a role in prayer. The definition of a saint is...

NM: For Catholics.

JML: For Protestants too.

NM: forgive my ignorance. You know, I know very little about that sort of matter but it seems to me that the Catholics have about five times as many saints as the Protestants. Is that true or not?

NM: The protestant church declares saints?

JML: Well, they do have saints. I mean, St. George is a Protestant saint.

There are many saints. Episcopalians and Lutherans will recognize.... All a saint is is someone who is in heaven, who is definitely in heaven.

Obviously, if there is a heaven and there are as many people up there as Christians think there are, there are untold numbers in heaven. However, to know for certain that someone is in heaven, that's the definition of a saint.

and the Lutherans who are closer to the Catholics. And then you get the

NM: Among Catholics? Literally? In the Bible I think the idea of the

will give you the idea of the

JML: Literally. And protestants too. I'm certain. So when you say, "Oh, he was a saint." Well, you'd say, "how do you know?" So when the Church says, this person is a saint...

NM: The protestant church declares saints?

JML: Oh, yes.

NM: Who are the Baptist saints?

JML: I can't speak about that. I think there is a spectrum. The Episcopalians and the Lutherans who are closer to the Catholics. And then you get the Methodists. And then as you move to the Baptists I think the idea of the saint goes away.

NM: I think among fundamentalists you almost never hear about saints.

JML: No, but you do among the Mormons. The Church of Later Day

Saints.

NM: Well, we can't begin to discuss Mormons. It's so different from everybody else.

JML: It isn't so different. The dictionary of the saint. (*can't make out--- you guys are talking over each other.*) Well, anyway, they are there to intercede with the Lord. Certain saints intercede on certain matters. For example, Michael, the Arch Angel, is invoked before battles and has been for centuries. At the other end of the scale, St. Anthony is there to help find

things. And the prayer is this: "Dear St. Anthony/Please look around/ I've lost my ring/ and it must be found." Now, I can tell you that it works about 70% of the time. At least in my family it does.

NM: Well, and you might find it 70 % of the time on your own.

JML: Absolutely. And you never know. But it is uncanny how many times you say that and....

NM: I won't buy that and I'll tell you why. I have the experience all the time of not having remembered something. And I've learned to tip my hat to my unconscious and say, alright, maybe I'll find it later in the day and I usually do. I don't need St. Anthony. One of the things is that I also believe that the unconscious is also a communication system and sometimes you

have to go searching further and further. In other words, there is an expenditure of energy to find out where you lost something. You have to re-trace the past which very often has dim signals so more attention has to be paid, it's more exhausting. Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. I like doing crossword puzzles—I say they comb my brain. Very often I'll be doing a tough crossword puzzle and I'll leave a great many blanks. Then three or four hours later, or possibly the next day if I pick it up again I'll find the words I didn't have. Why? Because the unconscious was working on it quietly and came up with it. So that's my St. Anthony.

JML: Let me give you another example. Last year when you spoke at the Provincetown theater and I was in a cast I had the cane that you gave me. And then we came in for the party here and I lost the cane. I couldn't find it and I was very upset. And so I said to my son Joe, help me find the cane. I

must have left it in the theatre. So we went back to the theatre the next day and I looked all over the stage and all over the place. Joe said the prayer, walked into the dressing room and there was a cabinet in the green-room that was in the back and there was a small space about this wide and the cane was there. I asked him, "Why did you go there?" and he said, "I just felt when I walked in the room that I was directed to it."

NM: Well, that's not evidence.

JML: No, it isn't evidence...

NM: I will say to pray to St. Anthony may focus the mind on the real possibilities. Very often when we are looking for something that is lost what we're lacking is focus when we begin the search. And one of the ironies of

prayer is very often it can serve as a fine focus for other matters or adjacent matters or relative matters or direct matters. It's a focus. And I think a lot of people pray in order to intensify there sense of focus. What I don't like about prayer is the enormous baggage that goes with it, the stultification of society that is also common in prayer; the number of mediocre imbasils who all pray for something that they know nothing about with this huge confidence that goes nowhere—you see huge examples of it on television every night—speaking of the efficacy of prayer and they're either a simpleton, a dullard or a malcontent.

JML: I agree. Well, the last line of this is that my point is that prayer is spiritually pliable. Many-faceted, multi-purposed, and at the end of the bell shaped curve, noble and eggnoble and maybe the eggnoble is asking St. Anthony to find your lost ring or something. I would just challenge you the

next three times you lost something to say, "St. Anthony I've lost something."

NM: No, I can't do it. Let's get into that. If we're really going to accept prayer, one you have to be Catholic, two you have to grow up with the notion of St. Anthony. My point is that praying to St. Anthony may help you to find something, but you have a lot of secondary habits that point you toward a focus, a high focus. In other words, a lot of the high benefits we receive from the saints come from the fact that most people have a dreadful time bringing any kind of focus to their existence. And thinking about saints helps them to focus. Listen, the church didn't last for two thousand years for too little. I, obviously not being a catholic, feel that the distortions in Catholicism are immense. But I'm not going to say that they are ineffective, no. I'd say they are fifty percent effective. It's been very, very good for a

good many people in a good many ways, it's just also that its been stomped upon. Stomped upon with human imagination and I would argue, and this is the greatest sacrilege that I can come up with as far as Catholics are concerned: I would say that Catholicism ultimately has to be seen as stultifying to God. And half possessed by the Devil. And I would say the same for any other religion. I don't slight Catholicism as the villain. All organized religions, in that sense, are obfuscations upon the nature of God.

JML: But you have talked about God's involvement in some of the great religions over the years.

NM: How not. How not? How about the Devil's involvement? There they are, they're battling it out in the streets of the religion. There is not a seminary in the world of whatever persuasion where you don't have god and the devil working day and night right down into the acolyte's genitals for

god sake; the temptations the agonies, the repressions the wonders. Those wonders that the seminarians have of whether they are working for God or the Devil.

JML: I always remember the story of Jeff Davis when he was in the Seminary for a year and he said at night he would go into his room and he would have a little tiny radio he wasn't supposed to have and he would turn it on and listen to Frank Sinatra. He didn't even climb over the wall or go into the town, but finally he realized that if he was listening to Sinatra every night he was in the wrong game. He'd better get out. And he did.

So, is there anything else?

NM: Do I have anything more to say about prayer?

JML: You did allude to a couple of times when you felt the need to say a prayer when someone was very ill.

I told you, the last time I prayed. That was just, Oh, God, (Oh, God, don't let him die. You know, I wouldn't call it a prayer. It was more like a blast. It

JML: For Norris? Whatever god's disposition, a bullet through the head is not likely to inspire a miracle.

Yea.

Tape ends

JML: You told us.

NM: It's in there already? Too bad.

JML: Well, the other time I remember you actually talking about prayer in your own life is when bobby Kennedy was wounded.

NM: Yea, but that was different. That was just, Oh, God, Oh, God, don't let him die. You know, I wouldn't call it a prayer. It was more like a bleat. It was meaningless. Whatever god's disposition, a bullet through the head is not likely to inspire a miracle.

TAPE ENDS

Interview conducted June 14, 2006 Provincetown, MA

J. M. Lennon: One of the most difficult things about your theology for me is that you believe that humans don't always know what the right action is, but your God, as you have said, need and seeks the efforts of humans and vice-versa. He is the general, we are the army—the army of light, I guess we could call it. Wouldn't prayer be an avenue for the general to communicate with his troops? I mean, prayer might be a way to get a sense of what God wants done in the cosmic war.

Norman Mailer: Well, I think you're conflating a whole series of separate notions. To me there are three, four or five questions that have to be

answered bit by bit because to try to reply directly to your question we'd be all over the place. Let's go through it phrase by phrase, because there is an awful lot there in that question. So read it again and I'll stop you when I...

JML: One of the most difficult things about your theology for me is that you believe that humans don't always know what the right action is.

NM: All right. Right there. Of course we don't know. Read a little further if you would.

JML: All right. But God, your God, needs and seeks the efforts of humans and vice-versa.

NM: There, that's the full question. There is a marvelous remark by Trotsky who said: "You can tell the truth by comparison of the lies." Now of course, some of those Lennons and those Trotskys were almost God-like in their confidence, right or wrong. Of course they were very wrong on so many things. But the fact is, if we're going to get an interesting notion of God, we can't have (sounds like 'a simpleton' ...)...in other words, they can learn from people's errors and from people's misapprehensions and people's absolute false notion of certainty, almost as much as they can learn from someone who is absolutely truthful which is a rare condition for human beings given the fact that we're all so profoundly divided. In other words, when we speak of being truthful, which is the parenthesis for all of this, what we're talking about is one half of us is really expressing itself. Very very rarely do the two sides come together as I've said many a time. When they do, one has huge energy. (can't make out....)when your worst

is...Let me limit it again. I believe that God is engaged in the cosmos with carrying a vision that he has across the cosmos and there is huge resistance out there in the cosmos and within, given my notion that the Devil exists. I certainly didn't spend five years on a book, The Castle in the Forest, without believing that there is an equal force to God in the Devil. So in that sense, it isn't that the general has to communicate with his troops. Give me the phrase again, I really want to be responsive to it.

JML: God is the general. We are a part of his army, the army of like.

Wouldn't prayer be an avenue for the general to communicate with his troops.

NM: Is that the next question?

motivator and your best motivator are equally engaged then you're full of energy, but that's a rare occurrence. But let's go on. I think there's more in there.

JML: Well, I guess the central part of the question for me is the general needs to communicate with the troops and the troops with the genera...

NM: No, no, no... Now listen....

ML: Otherwise the metaphor doesn't work with the genera.

NM: I've used it. I've used that metaphor mainly to say that a good general doesn't keep his troops waiting out in the rain. I've used that much more as a novelist than for God and his people. To speak of God as a general

JML: No, it's the same one.

NM: Forgive me, but I really feel you're vulgarizing the whole concept. If

God is the general and we are his troops—that is a very rough metaphor, it's

mine—but you can't start perusing it literally, getting into chains of

command and this and that. It's presumptuous. All I can have about the

nature of God is not (*sounds like 'confidence'.*) I can have intimations. I

have one fundamental intimation; God is not All-Powerful.

JML: You have always said that humans are the third force.

ML: Yes, yes.

JML: And that God wants us to step up to the plate and work for his vision.

So, I would assume at some point....

NM: You're assuming too much.

JML: No communication at all is what you're saying.

NM: No, no, no, no. I'm saying we have instincts. We have our instincts.

Sometimes they're accurate, sometimes they are inaccurate. We work on the basis of our instincts. Don't forget, very often what we're doing, very often, to be crude about it, we're working for the Devil. Sometimes we're working for God. Most of the time, neither. The two neutralize each other to a great extent. There are times when we are working for human-kind alone, when

we want no part of God or the Devil. It's these complexities that we're living with. I don't want it to get too schematic to begin with.

JML: Ok. Alright, let me give you another one.

NM: Have I answered you?

JML: Yes, I think you have answered me. In an earlier interview you said you doubted the efficacy of prayer because you said that most prayer were requests for personal gains or status; money, a job, a new car or what have you. I agree there is a huge funnel of such requests going up at all times, but other people pray for guidance, for forgiveness, for strength to avoid sin. These types of prayers may exceed the grasping, greedy type. Who could say?

NM: I would agree. They do exceed it. And there is a spectrum of prayer, from Noble prayer to Self-seeking prayer to Vulgar prayer. And we can talk about that at a great length today. There is a natural assumption in humans that prayer is noble. In other words, if it isn't asking for something from God ... "God, how can I possibly, me, my meek, humble self, how can I possibly help you because I wish to help you." This is seen as nobler than saying, "I would really like an Impala with loud speakers." Ok, sure. But the point is that I just have a visceral distrust of the efficacy of prayer as a form of communication. For one thing, I'm not sure that God pays attention to prayer, I don't think that God can afford to pay attention to prayer. Think of it as an immensely abused and over-used communication system that is present in human affairs. In other words, God is getting messages all the time from every human being and picks up these messages without the need

of prayer. I think where prayer enters is that occasionally prayers can have such a vibrancy and such a simplicity and such humanity that god is illumined by it and cheered by it. To that extent I will say, who am I to say that prayer never has any meaning? I do think that ninety percent of prayer is wasteful. I think it is self indulgent and, at its worst, it is a species of (*can't make out*) . I heard too many people too many times say in a slightly dead voice, "I'm praying for you." Or, I'm praying for this or I'm praying for that. My own feeling is, and this is crude, but my reaction is, "Go fuck yourself." You don't need it. It's not helping. You're just invading my presence. I see too much of that in prayer and it's just one more petty human weapon. If one human says, "I'm praying for you," there is a suggestion there. It could be well intended, obviously, that they love you, they care about you they worry about you, they're doing the best for you. But my feeling is you don't need to pray if that is the case. If they love you

and really care about you and are feeling that, then you are going to reap that benefit whether they pray for you or not.

JML: How?

NM: How? Through the warmth and feeling you are getting from them.

The honest warmth of feeling rather than the mechanical "I'll pray for you."

JML: You feel that ninety percent of prayer is meretricious?

NM: No, meretricious is too strong a word. Ninety percent of prayer doesn't necessarily lead to anything.

JML: Just static.

NM: Well, to begin with, I think the interception of prayer is one of the Devil's most powerful faculties. Whenever prayer is offered which does not have true purity to it, the Devil has a ball with it. The Devil sees the motives of certain people, sees their needs, sees how to work on their needs. You don't know who you're broadcasting to.

JML: Many religious people find solace in praying together. They believe that group prayer, rather at a religious service or in a group of people, is a more efficacious way of reaching the Lord. Now, the Lord may be too busy for a single cry for intercession, but he can hardly neglect a full house of prayers say, from St. Peters, led by the pope on his son's birthday; quantity changes quality as you are forever telling it.

NM: There is no question in my mind that that would attract God's attention more. You still get into the nature of the prayer. For example, right now we're engaged in a deadly war between Islam and ourselves. Well, if there is anything that characterizes Islam is that they pray together all the time, five times a day indeed. Five times a day they put their nose to the ground and they raise their buttocks towards heaven and they pray and they pray. And we in the west look down on it. We consider it excessive. We don't believe, first off, in Allah, but that's another matter entirely. But if there is Allah, we don't believe that Allah is well intentioned. We believe that Allah is an alien God. So there, the answer to your question is the fact people, whenever they get together, the fact that you have a community of opinion, whenever you have a theater audience and they all laugh as one you could say that that is an extension of prayer. It's human unity, and human unity is very reassuring. To feel that one is part of a great group of people does a lot

for us. But whether prayer is the essence of it is quite another matter. And, as I say, if you're going to say that these prayers to Christ for our soldiers in Iraq and you have a whole community praying that our soldiers don't run into terrorists and then you've got Islamics praying just as powerfully and just as intently that they all get assassinated by roadside bombs—I don't mean to say that every Islamic prayer says that, but a good many of them have that in essence.

JML: Nor does every Christian meeting pray for our soldiers in Iraq. I would say that the people in Italy, at St. Peters, may be praying for us to get out of there.

NM: Alright. Exactly. What I'm getting at is I believe there is a certain telepathic power that humans have. You get a hundred people together, a

thousand people together, or ten thousand, yes the effect is magnified. But to assume it's magnified to good purpose is a very large extension. It can be magnified to a good purpose, to an evil purpose. It can be magnified to a complex and not particularly pertinent purpose. It could be off. Humans are off all the time. America spent close to fifty years believing that Russia was the evil empire while all the time this very ugly, cruel place was getting weaker and weaker and growing worse and worse and less capable of destroying us.

JML: We were praying against it too. Praying for its collapse.

NM: we weren't praying for its collapse, we were praying for its absolute destruction. We were hoping that when a war came we would destroy the Russians they wouldn't destroy us.

JML: But when we read in the newspapers about what was going on in Russia in the seventies and eighties and how grim it was, I'm sure a lot of people were saying, "The Lord is bringing the Russians to their knees."

NM: Well, now you have a great many people saying, "maybe the Lord will bring Islam to its knees." Islam is saying, "Allah will take care of us and bring the great Satan to its knees." And so on. The notion that a country is holy I find offensive.

JML: Right. Even in the Islamic world we know there is such a chasm between the Sunnis and the Shiites. Their detestation of each other is profound. As long as Saudi is over there....

NM: They make the old animosity between the catholics and the protestants seem rather agreeable.

JML: You've spoken about dreams being a contested field. That is that the Divine and Demonic forces use dreams to send their messages to humans. If this is true, why can't God and the Devil also communicate their messages to an awoken mind? A mind seeking a line of communication with something transcended. I assume you believe that humans can pray to the Devil as easily as the Lord.

NM: Unwittingly, unwittingly. Let me put it this way, I think that people who believe in the Devil have ceremonies which are not exactly prayer, they are invocations. There is a fundamental belief which is curious if you think about it, in magical groups which are black oriented that you don't get the

Devil by praying to him or her. You invoke him or her. Whereas in Christianity, certainly, the notion that you have a ceremony to invoke God is considered dubious at best. The only place it occurs is in the Mass, I guess. The substantiation of the wafer and the wine. Other than that, you don't invoke god. You pray to God, you don't invoke God.

JML: Well, behind that point, is the notion that if God and the Devil see the territory of dreams at night as a place where their minions get in and send messages and it's so scrambled and fouled up that I always thought that that is why you said the interpretation of dreams is so unreliable. You know, there are so many forces in there.

NM: Exactly.