

When you listen or read intelligently, you use both the hermeneutics of **attention** (What's here, and why?) and the hermeneutics of **suspicion** (What's not here, and why not?). When the children asked Rainer Maria Rilke to tell a story and, for a change, leave God out, they were fulfilling neither canon of interpretation. They'd attended to the fact that Rilke mentioned God in all his STORIES OF GOD FOR GIRLS AND BOYS, but they didn't ask him why; nor did they ask what he was leaving out, and why....Well, what occasioned this Thinksheet was my attending to the fact that increasingly, God is left out of public discourse in our country; and I am asking why. Why should I leave the G-word to the fundamentalists? Further, I've noticed "what's here" in loco Dei, instead of, as a surrogate or holophrase for, God--and why. My consciousness is raised on all four questions, so I pass the test of an intelligent hearer/reader on this topic.

1. But I've noticed also that even among the religiously committed there's been little consciousness-raising on this topic. Gallup says 97% of Americans think God is the center of reality: I ask, why is God seldom even on the periphery of conversations? I answer, because the populace is taught (in our public schools and by the media) to leave God out of conversation (and thus out of consideration: what you don't talk about doesn't get your attention, and what doesn't get your attention is **not real** for you). When one's consciousness is not theocentric, something else is central (see #2255); and if one is passionate about that something else, God will not come in even peripherally, and one will fall under the divine curse along with "the nations that forget God" (Ps.9.17; the other vs. in the strophe a warning not to forget the poor. Alternatives for "nations": "pagans" [Mof], "heathens" [Knox], "all those" [TEV]). I need hardly comment that for those for whom God has little reality, the notion of a divine curse has no reality at all: "there is no fear of God in them." Nor is there any God-fear in those who've sentimentalized God, which means almost everybody in our liberal churches. As for the psychotheology of God wanting our attention, consider the tragedy of a schoolroom in which the teacher fails to get and hold the pupils' attention; consider, too, the tragedy of a lover jilted, scorned, forgotten.

2. The **godless** leave God out for the same reason I leave out learning Tibetan: I can't think of any reason why I should learn Tibetan, given the vast spread of things I don't know; & the godless are undermotivated to believe in God, to put God in, into their thinking and their lives. Thus they are incapable of personal "scrupulous godlessness." (Romans who got "scruples"--small, sharp stones--in their sandals had walking-discomfort: ethically, scruples are feelingful ideas that inhibit action [call them also inhibitions or qualms].) If they have a scruple, a conviction, against hypocrisy, they will scruple to put God in opportunistically, for social-political effects; but the unethical godless will use God-talk to ingratiate themselves with the godly....The double reverse is true of the **godly** (believers in God). Their scruple is to put God in,* to "keep the Lord ever before their eyes" and on their lips and wordprocessors. Their social-political temptation is to leave God out occasionally or even generally. Occasionally: Sometimes they think to "get farther," for themselves and/or their message, if they are God-silent. Generally: As a matter of policy, they make no public God-references, arguing that "some might be offended" and even that "it would be unfair in our pluralistic culture." A Christian form of the latter is Christians who leave Jesus out because "there are / might be Jews present." (Some antisemites twist this into an argument for excluding Jews, even for executing them!)* Ie, their scruple is against leaving God out. Note here the negative form of my definition of scruple; here, a feelingful idea inhibiting **inaction**.

3. Scrupulosity is an ethical term; psychiatrically it means compulsive, life-crippling behavior (eg, perpetual handwashing); popularly, having scruples means you haven't been "liberated": like guilt, scruples are bad and something to be gotten rid of....A **taboo**, or tabu, is a sacrally motivated scruple, or at least a scruple with sacred overtones. What makes the abortion controversy so hairy and even scary is that so many "pro-life" advocates are frenetic, fanatic believers in the sacredness of the fetus. Many of my Thinksheets are attacks on what I consider life-crippling, or at least life-impoverishing, taboos. This Thinksheet is against a taboo of some of the godly, viz, scrupulously (consciously / unconsciously-habitually) being godless in public communication if not also in private conversation.

4. Caution! Sin is anything extended far enough in a straight line, and the compulsive God-talker is a case in the psychiatric sense, a public nuisance. Naturally, compulsive God-silents and compulsive God-talkers use each other as bad examples: "You want me to be like THEM?" Would that the extremes would cancel, instead of thus reinforcing, each other! Rather, I'm appealing to the godly to be "ready" (1P.3.15) for God-openings, be concerned to improve your skills of communicating the Word (narrowly here, the G-word, speaking of God for God), be prophetic without giving unnecessary offense (but don't imagine you can be a Christian with your mouth without ever giving ANY offense). The more you practice the presence and purpose of God, the more fire you'll have in your bones (Jer.20.9), **prophetic urge** and urgency (cf. Jesus' "the very stones would cry out" and Paul's "woe is me if I preach not the gospel").

5. I'm addressing a cultural phenomenon that amounts to a conspiracy of silence against mentioning God. In the case of believers, the reasons are timidity (the fear of confronting, "what would happen if I...?" and "I don't want to seem holier-than-thou"), weak conviction, theological confusion, & lack of communication-skills. As for unbelievers, **aggressive secularism** is on the rise: the less God is spoken of in the culture, the easier it is to join the partisans who want to quash all God-talk and who use the case of semiliterate televangelists to strengthen their cause. The public, even the believing public, is poorly defended against this anti-God campaign; for almost the entire public, as I cannot tire of saying, learned in our public schools to get along without God-talk.

6. "**Values**" have no persuasive force unless dignified and empowered by ultimacy of roots and reach, ie, by religion. Yet our **public school** establishment continues to prate about "teaching values" without using our civilization's religious undergirding of the selected values. So far, the widest cooperation on addressing this problem is the coalition behind the recent pamphlet titled "Religion in the Public School Curriculum: Questions and Answers" (including such diverse groups as NCC, NAE, NEA, & AAR). It rules out mentioning creation (which so-called "scientific creationists" wrongly say can be taught without the G-word) in science classes, though "the account of creation found in various scriptures may be discussed in a religious studies class or in any course that considers religious explanations for the origin of life." Further, "teachers may not invoke religious authority" for the "basic moral values that are recognized by the population at large (e.g., honesty, integrity, justice, compassion)." But the issue is not religious authority: that is to be exercised only in particular religious institutions. The issue is religious **grounding**, religious incentives, motives, supports children need to internalize if the values are to be engendered, become habitual as character. The selection of the particular values is culture-particular no matter how much effort is put forth to represent the selection as culture-general, based on a naturalistic ethic: why not admit that the supports for the selected values are also culture-particular, Western, ours, and therefore to be passed on to and through America's children (else how argue for the use of tax money to support the public schools)?....Radically revisionist history results, retroactively, from this bracketing out of the religious underpinnings of values. The children are not told the Pilgrims' religious motivation, or that Johnny Appleseed was a traveling evangelist whose thing was community-formation (the seed pitch being, hang in here till you can harvest the apples), or that Martin Luther King, Jr. was a (Protestant) minister...On PBS "Ideas," Bill Moyers asked Ethicist Josephson "Is special revelation necessary to ground ethical values?" Answer (of course!), no; which BM left unchallenged....But research psychologist / psychoanalyst / cancer-healer Lawrence LeShan (HOW TO MEDITATE et al) says that values root in "religious, romantic, and compassionate feelings." When he spoke here in Craigville recently, I referred to Rilke's saying to the children "Even if I were to leave God out, He would come in after the last sentence." And LL said, "I'll use that!"

7. The flap over the film "The Last Temptation of Christ" is good for God-talk. Putting God into conversation is sometimes divisive, but leaving God out is always eventually disastrous.