

NOWHERE, you'd think, from just letting the media hurricane wash over you. That answer would do for the god/desses Elijah mocked, but not for his God--not for the biblical God.

We biblical peoples--Jews & Christians--do not have the pagan luxury of explaining awkward untowardnesses by the temporary absence or sleep or unconcern of our deity. When it comes to the whole "O.J." event, we have some theodic (God-defending) explaining to do, since we claim that our God is ever-&-always here (omnipresent), "can do" (is omnipotent), knows everything that's going on (omniscience), & "cares about all he has made" (all-loving). So, where was/is God in "O.J."?

1 God was/is **suffering**, as "the Fellow-Sufferer who understands"--a truth most sharply & poignantly visible in the Cross, an event which is fully up to being termed "the death of God on a cross." Televising the trial made a media circus, a global soap, out of what began as a private anguish of three families; but the cameras did send ripples of suffering around the world, as the Cross has (though a recent report says the world knows the Macdonald arches [actually, breasts] better than it does the Cross). Sympathy is the ability to "suffer-with": empathy ("suffering in") is what the Cross calls us to do: to suffer as God does, in all the world's suffering. Impossible? Yes, but "with God everything's possible" (Mt.19.26+). Besides being an extension of the eye of God, the tube can/should be an extension of our hearts.

2 God was/is within us, **calling us to prayer**. When you first heard of the crime, did you pray? if so, for whom & to what ends? Did you pray as you heard/saw/read about the trial? and in the shocking aftermath? Those who do not believe in the biblical God could watch the whole tragedy at a distance, thinking themselves unable to do anything about it, & therefore irresponsible--& therefore, in the human-involvement sense, unresponsive. But those who believe in prayer are never unable to do something, so never unresponsive/uninvolved/unresponsible(irresponsible). Nor are we left to pray alone, with no prayer chains, no prayer groups, no prayer in public worship.

3 God, as world-&-soul **Teacher**, was/is making it more difficult for us not to think. To a physician yesterday, I said, "Religion does not exist in spite of death but because of it": we are the one animal that long knows it's going to die; & (as Mark Twain put it) "Having a gun pointed at you wonderfully concentrates your attention." The fact that we got born doesn't much stimulate pondering; & dying, being the only other thing all of us do, is God's only other chance at getting us to think--our dying, others' dying. Paradoxically, the funeral is God's best school of the life of the mind. "O.J." got the world to think about death: God the Teacher was there.

4 And God the **Lover** was/is there. Think of it: none of all this suffering would have occurred had not love been there first. To eyes of faith, every love points both backward & forward to the Great Love. Without eyes of faith, human beings cannot see backwards & forwards from their love experiences, & so can pray only for their own self-imprisoned little loves (the theme of 95% of pop music, even of gangsta rap). What opens one's eyes of faith, which God gives by grace as by nature he gives us our eyes of flesh, is what I call the romantic imagination, by which the beloved is forever beautiful, & through which we glimpse what a great hymn calls the "Love that will not let us go," & will not let us down....EXERCISE: Make a love analysis of the O.J. event.

5 In the Bible, priest/prophet/king/judge are to be first servants of God, then of the people. As the Bible is as narrow as possible on deity, allowing/worshipping only One, religious/political/judicial functions on earth have their counterparts in, & are to be understood as un/faithful reflections of, the situation in heaven, from which God is "**Judge of all the earth**," who "do[es] what is just" (Gn.18.25 NRSV): where, in the O.J. event, do you see the upper Judge (Ito being the lower judge) doing justice? Or do you think that lower court acted unjustly, & justice must await the effects of O.J.'s conscience &/or altered relationships, or the afterlife?....If you

wonder why I'm not eager to thrust on you my opinions (O.J. guilty? Jury derelict?), as almost everybody seems to be doing these days, it's because my opinions don't interest me as much as yours do--or rather, as much as how you think, & whether you try to think Christianly, about the whole mess.

6 Was God judging our **police** system: certainly a heavy judgment on the LAPD, which must now get more serious about cleaning up its act & tightening its procedures. God was judging our **court** system? It seems so:

(1) Without television, would the trial have been more than a quarter as long as it was? It cost L.A. taxpayers some \$7 million (& O.J. about \$10 million). Perhaps courtroom television should be limited to the otherwise invisible--but who would watch if the accused were not famous for being known (ie, a "celeb")?

(2) "The race card" was the only factor in changing the trial venue: the location was a political, not a judicial decision. Result? O.J. was not judged, as our legal tradition, codes, & laws demand, by a jury of his **peers** (from Lat. "par," equal), those of his class. "Peers," in the British "House of Peers," means nobles, lords. The theory that your own kind (class, rank, social level) know you best & therefore can best judge you.

For two decades, O.J.'s "own kind," peers, the people who knew him best, were his neighbors, his fellow country-club members, those he personally identified with & one of whom he married (a blond, after dumping his black wife). Further, the crime was committed where the peers lived, indeed in O.J.'s own home. Why then was our jury system violated, by moving the trial to a location where his peers weren't? Because the politics of race (the need for a jury of "racial balance," read "black majority") was substituted for the jurisprudence of class: the trial was officially jury-rigged before it started. After the jury selection was completed, the trial was all downhill.

(3) "Somebody is trying to tell us something" is the humorous way we suggest God the Teacher is at work. Classism may be bad, but isn't racism worse?

(4) Would a random (no-challenge) selection of jurors be fairer? Or fairer still, a computer selection based on prospects' self-profiling? Using the self-profiles (extensive personal-inventory submissions by prospects), a computer concluded that the 12 selected would never convict of murder (1) a rich man or (2) a sports hero. (Poor Marcia Clark!)

(5) Defense regularly held focus groups all over peer territory, ie areas in which people like the jurors lived. They discovered that among them, wife beating was not the big deal the prosecution thought it was (& spent weeks of court-time on, to the boredom of the jury). The prosecution had no focus groups, a major blunder.

(6) The cultural level of the jurors was inadequate for the complexity & data-intricacy of the evidence. The DNA talk made them groggy, & they sat up when the glove (which couldn't fit over a latex glove!) didn't fit....leading to Johnnie Cochran's black-preacher assonance "If it doesn't fit, acquit."

(7) Something like 45% of American adults are functionally illiterate. Illiterates watch tabloid-type television news, snippets sandwiched in between ads, but have no other exposure--true of all the jurors!--to any other news source. (Not even one juror regularly reads a newspaper, a medium in which you control the speed at which the news hits you, & so can stop for pondering-time.)

(8) Was the trial fair? No & yes. NO: How could a trial be fair (a) when the accused is not being judged by a jury of his peers & (b) when the case requires high-class thinking & the court provides only low-class jurors? YES: The jurors did the best they could, as did the lawyers & the judge.

7 As classism, despite our egalitarian rhetoric, survived the birth of our democracy, racism has survived, now many generations, the death of slavery. On the O.J. matter, we should be less concerned to assign blame & administer punishment than to assume our several responsibilities for rectifying our police-&-court system & praying/speaking/acting toward a more just society.