

"How do you spend Sundays?"

Dear Gabe,

1 As you know, in #3165.5 ("Historicism as the ghost of History") I mentioned that 31 years ago I assigned 1968 as one of two texts in a systematic-theology course: it combined Christian revelation as a given with an incompatible rationalistic historicism, a mix that made for vigorous classroom discussion. Thank you for giving me opportunity to deal further with Kaufman, by providing me with the two papers.

2 NEWSWEEK's Ken Woodward considered beginning a column with this Kaufman story. At lunch with K. at Harv.DS, I asked him the question now titling this Think-sheet. Enthusiastically, he mentioned a string of activities--not including public worship. Though Ken did not submit the column, its point was to be the gap between the churches & the theologians, who (unlike philosophers) are (traditionally) the churches' (& the Christian faith's, & Christ's) intellectual servants. My point was that you aren't a Christian during the rest of the week if you didn't go to church Sunday: Christianity (unlike, e.g., Hinduism) is inherently communal.

K. came to believe (2000.12) that "The question of God was to be addressed in terms of whether one wanted to live a Christian life, not in terms of some abstract notion of truth." Since church-going is an essential element of living "a Christian life" & K. was not a church-goer, the God-question was not Christianly real for him.

For most who profess the Christian religion, Sunday "church" is the main (if not the only) exposure to the Christian language. K. agrees with G.H.Mead that language creates mind. Now, as Christian language creates the Christian mind, one who is not regularly exposed to the Christian language does not have a Christian mind. As you know, I believe linguistic formation, intellectual formation, & spiritual formation are facets of the same reality. If the language changes significantly--as K. refuses to use the (biblical) masculine languages for God (all the personal titles & pronouns) (1977.3,5,6)--the religion changes to (as you know I said in NEWSWEEK & elsewhere) "a new religion": K. is pushing a new religion (which uses some Christian terms, as also the Qur'an does).

3 K. is too philosophical (his preferred PhD field, but it cut him off from theology --but as the theology PhD did not cut him off from philosophy, he did his PhD in theology) to be comfortable with relativistic pluralism ("you have your heritage/POV, I have mine"). He must have a cosmic bottom-line: he's as foundationalist--now that he believes in "the serendipitous creativity in the cosmos" (2000.28)--as he was when he believed in the biblical God, whom now he considers unimaginable (despite his touted theology-as-"imaginative construction"!): 29: "What could we possibly be imagining when we attempt to think of God as an all-powerful personal reality, existing somehow before and independent of what we call today 'the universe?'"

Foundationalism teaches that something is true because self-evident, & self-evident because understood. Since junior high, K. has "understood" reality as evolutionary. What hasn't evolved isn't real; ergo, the biblical deity is not real (29): "What possible content can a more or less traditional idea of God [as personal "creator-agent"] have for those of us who today think of the universe in our modern evolutionary-historical way, according to which no life or consciousness can be imagined [!] apart from" "evolutionary developments?"

4 What's so pathetic about K.'s evolutionistic-historicistic foundationalism is its imaginal poverty, the same as my public-school biology teacher laid on me in 1930: my commitment to biblical religion survived junior high, K.'s only seemed to. Theism & evolutionism (not evolution) are mutually exclusive options.

Pathetic also is the fact that K.'s evolved-emergent deity-as-creativity makes no significant advance on H.N.Wieman's 1925 (!) work (of which I gave my copy to a tutorial student of mine last year). At least once I told you, Gabe, that on every paper I handed in in the four courses I had with W., he wrote "Must you believe in a personal God?" In 1968, K. refers to W. only in a note (on p.428, referred to on p.430): "...what rose from the dead was not the man Jesus; it was creative power. It was the living God that [sic] works in time. It was the Second Person

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of the Trinity. It was Christ the God, not Jesus the man." (An instance of W.'s shameless appropriation of the Christian vocabulary to his "naturalistic theism.") In a note on pp.429-30, K. uses Jn.Knox's expansive use of "Christ" to bridge from W., implying something untrue, viz. that J.K. rejected (as did W. & does K.) Jesus' survival of death (deeply untrue, as I--J.K.'s literary assistant during his development of "Christ-Event" thinking--can testify). K. is seven years my junior, & first encountered W.'s (1946) *THE SOURCE OF HUMAN GOOD* in the library of K.'s father, who was pres. of Bethel (Mennonite) College (Ks.) & a 1928 UCDS (U.Chic. Div.School) PhD. K. grew up in the college church, where he was much later ordained, though he never had any intention of pastoring. (He's never been out of school, & his writing shows it.)

Once again, K.'s foundationalism (30): "The truly foundational sort of creativity appears to be that exemplified in the evolution of life rather than that portrayed in human purposive activity." Cosmic purpose is an illicit anthropomorphism. But (31) "creativity is appropriate for naming God" as mystery & as "serendipitous" emergent of the novel. Theologizing as "imaginative construction is driven by the **moral** [K.'s emphasis] necessity of living rightly in the world in which we find ourselves." God & the moral are the "Two Central Themes" in "My Life and My Theological Reflection" (2000). The second theme, admittedly a derivative from his Mennonite-anabaptist background & ethics, has always had more reality for him than has had the first--for (8) "I seem to be 'tone deaf' with respect to so-called religious experience....talk about **experience** [his emphasis] of God involves what philosophers call a 'category mistake,' and should not, therefore, be engaged in." More pathos: A blind man trying to describe sunrises & sunsets. S.K. was so right: some theologians are only moralists in religious disguise.

5 Confirmatory of K.'s essential moralism is his eschatology, which consists of hope that humanity will get a better grasp on its pro-human & pro-environmental responsibilities. Feuerbach redivivus (32): "a heavenly father...is no longer available." Process theology: no "ontological separation" between "God (creativity)" & the world; but "God" is "the **sole** [his emphasis] appropriate focus for human devotion and worship, that [sic] which alone can properly orient human life" & save us from "dangerous idols that bring disaster into human affairs."

6 K.'s present project fails in claiming (the metaphor is mine) to have moved from a two-piece suit (revelation + reason) to a seamless garment (theological "imaginative constructions" out of materials emergent from the continuous experience of "serendipitous creativity"--which makes no advance on Wieman's definition of God as "the increase of appreciative awareness").

K.'s pragma (this in the last sentence of 2000's last note: his ultimate sanction, which functions as his dogma, is whatever "can be regarded as **fitting** [his emphasis] in this time and place in human history on planet Earth") has run over my dogma (viz., not passive pragma but active kerygma, the Story that we & the world are *misfits* &--by the pain of the Cross & the power of the Resurrection--need not continue to be so).

In both papers, ^{K.} wants to have it both ways as much as he did in 1968. He says (same note) "an ethic grounded in Christian self-giving love [i.e., his life-long personal ethic]...has significant pragmatic justification" and is "not an **arbitrary** [his emphasis] confessional one." If the Christian differentia (action-specifics) were derivable from secular sources-&-sanctions, how come his admired secular thinkers (Feuerbach et al) did not arrive at the Christian ethic?

7 For Enlightenment thinkers (Feuerbach, K.), it's awkward that reality-perceptions don't hold steady, so tomorrow may find you a misfit from having fitted in today. They believe in salvation by understanding (rather than, as in biblical religion, repentance from sin & faith in the Creator-Redeemer-Sanctifier). And they naively imagine that understanding gives access to truth--whereas the truth is that something untrue may be understood, & something we know to be true we may not understand: understanding & truth are independent variables.

Gabe, I'm not half through with what I intended to say about the two papers, but I'm whole through in that I refuse to lay on you more than one sheet of comments.