"ARE WE ALONE?"

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ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone 508.775.8008
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has been the media's & the media-appearing scientists' bottom-line question Life-on-Mars Day #1 (yesterday) & Day #2 (today, with massive NASA/CNN coverage). I'm more interested in the questioners than in the question: why's the question important for them? Indeed, why is it a question?

This Thinksheet (in preparation for teaching a short course on the Book of Revelation) is some ruminations on **imagination** as a sphere of spiritual action.

1 Let's begin with a few of what Jewish scholars call "responsa" (point-of-view reactions to an issue/question):

(1) It's a nonquestion. Of course we're not alone, though atheists think so.

(2) It's an ignorant question. The questioner should be informed that God is with us, indeed with his whole creation.

(3) It's a species-narcissistic question, neglectful of our sharing the biosphere with all God's other earthly living creatures. The same narcissism "right-to-life"ers areguilty of in their sacralizing of the human fetus.

(4) It's a materialist-biolatrous question. "We," the question implies, are not alone if "out there" are other biologicals, animated carbonifers. Would we be, to any humanly significant degree, less "alone" were it to be proved that Mars once had living cells (an idea CNN's outside expert on the panel today declared "unlikely," despite all the media hype)?

(5) A theologically ignorant commentator last night said "This is going to be hard on the creationists." Why? Christian theology has never claimed that God's creating activity has been & is limited to planet earth. It's a second-level category-error to think that the Mars thing will be hard on the Bible--the first-level category-error being the supposition that magnitude increase (the universe bigger than yesterday thought) diminishes majesty (God being inadequate, the idea goes, for so big a universe).

(6) In the Mars-thing question "Are We Alone?," who are "we"? Since God is the Creator of all earth-life (as well as life anywhere else), I can say "we" means the biosphere teeming with life without abandoning God the Father in favor of Gaia the Earth-Mother & its philosophical form, the claim that the whole earth is a living organism (on which see the whole 16:1 [1991] issue of the SCP JOURNAL).

(7) It's a boundary question, neither entirely scientific nor entirely spiritual; & it should be milked on both sides of the boundary.

(8) NASA's chief officer on the project is stressing the "various interpretations" (i.e. speculations, imaginings) at each of the six levels of the research. Since the Mars thing so far is an American thing, & public-school Americans have been educated to atheistic (god-less) science, we can be sure that the "scientific" & media reports/commentaries will be a-theist (Gk., "not-God"ly). So it's an opportunity for God-believing preachers/teachers to feed in a different food while the public mouth is awe-opened.

(9) The one theological claim we canonical-ecumenical Christians make vis-a-vis scientific speculations/advances is apophatic, negative: nothing ever anywhere was/is/will be outside the sovereignty of the one & only ("mono"-theism) God whom by repentance & faith we meet in the Spirit through God's gracious self-giving in his Son, Jesus Christ the Savior & Lord.

2 A 17th-century commentator on the Book of Revelation emphasized this Lordship of Jesus Christ as he splendidly appears in the 1st chapter. That author of Bible commentaries was also a father of modern science, inventing both the calculus (without which no astrophysics) & the reflecting telescope (without which no Hubble). Issac Newton's **imagination** ran forward on one rail into God's future & on the other into the future of science, for him neither way of knowing canceling or even weakening the other. Today Carl Sagan was several times quoted as saying that "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." Newton believed the evidence for Christianity was as extraordinary as its claims; & equally believed the same for the natural sciences. If biblical religion & natural science do not now reconverge, it will be the fault of unscientific & antireligious factors.

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3 Reflect on the question's ethos & pathos. Its ethos is a secular-humanistic culture in which "the frontiers of knowledge" (currently, "pushing back the envelop of ignorance") is so unchallenged a numinous goal that Clinton could immediately, on hearing of the Mars thing, & before the NASA/CNN panel, promise tax dollars to the project--confident that the American people would give this exotic search priority over undoubtedly humanitarian research competing for Federal funding. The pathos lies (1) in the soul-hunger for a new meaning for human existence, the old soul-satisfactions having been largely abandoned by the God-amnesiac public, & (2) in the fatuous assumption that life "out there" would somehow alleviate the aching loneliness of individuals who have now no invisible means of support in a meaningless universe (by contrast with the Jeffersonian-deistic meanings from belief in natural law & coinciding natural rights).

4 Clinton promised to "end welfare as we know it," & now has (shifting it from centralism to federalism, from Washington to the states). Scientifically, we have no prospect of learning, if we discover "conditions for life" on other planets in the universe, (1) whether life has actually arisen or, if so, (2) whether it's "life as we know it." If, as seems probable, we can never know by science whether any extraterrestrial life is enough like us to communicate with us, so that we're no longer "alone," we are faced not with probable scientific discovery but only with a continuation of scifi **imagination** of the variety of "Star Wars."

Three terms here: invention, discovery, revelation. Knowledge coming to us "without our [scientific] aid" is **revelation** (e.g. by [the biblical] God, & [?] UFOs). The scientific method enables some forms of **discovery**. And **invention** expands our knowledge-achieving (e.g. spectroscopy) & knowledge-receiving (e.g. telephone, radio, television, & [possibly, from "space"] the radio telescope)..... Epistemology studies the modes, limits, & validity tests of knowledge--to give us knowledge about knowing, as one dimension of wisdom. What I find most worrisome about the Mars thing is that it strengthens the prejudice that science, i.e. the scientific method, is the main or even only way of knowing. Scientists of this persuasion are easily corrupted by government (e.g. the Nazis) & business; & a public so persuaded is easily gulled into submitting to the Knowers with their pseudoscientific theories (e.g. Darwin, Marx, & Freud).

5 Biblical religion teaches that knowing is secondary: being known (by God) is primary. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me" (Ps.139.6; I can think nothing God's not aware of [vv.1-6], & go nowhere he isn't [vv.7-12]). One who lives this way experiences the relativization not of faith but of knowledge, i.e. of my/our objective knowing. I can detail the age 12-16 process by which faith became for me more important than the knowledge I had been acquiring by reading stacks of science texts. To put the same another way, knowledge became for me relatively unimportant, though all aspects of science continue to fascinate me. What most enthralls me is that GRACE HAPPENS (a bumper sticker proposed last Sunday, in talk-back after worship, by a physician working among the Boston poor--as a counterpoise, she asserted, to the bumper sticker SHIT HAPPENS, a less significant truth).

The theme of the Book of Revelation? GRACE HAPPENS NOW, & WILL PREVAIL! That old physician, so tiny she carries a footstool to worship so her feet won't dangle, is no Pollyanna. She's a hardheaded realist who knows she's not alone as daily she goes about her heartbreaking work. When in her work she prays the Lord's Prayer, her **imagination** embraces the truth that GRACE IS COMING!

6 Probably not, but maybe some primitive form of life long ago existed on the second rock from the sun, but on no other rock in our sun's planetary system except ours. Does that not increase your urge to thank God for this Privileged Planet we live on, the universe's only privileged planet we know of? By unscientific inference, atheist Carl Sagan demeans our habitation when he talks knowingly (!) about our "one paltry solar system." Spiritually, he's a pathetic product of the secularistic worldview our public schools have been imposing on our children for three generations. Public education was disestablished from its Protestant origins: now it needs DISESTABLISHMENT A SECOND TIME (the underreported 1982 book of R.M.Mc Carthy, J.W.Skillen, & W.A.Harper). In the most basic culture war, government should cease to give the advantage to humanistic haters of revealed religion.