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# AN OPEN LETTER TO WALTER BRUEGGEMANN ON BEING TOO IGNORANT TO MAKE DETERMINATE* DECISIONS AND TOO INTERESTED NOT TO TRY

* Effects-known. Decisions whose consequences, immediate & remote, are all foreknown.

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**Walter,**

Santayana was half right in his bromide that "Life is not a feast, it is a predicament": it's also a feast, & it was a feast to be with you for "Jeremiah" at "Faith Works" & to greet you & goodwife Mary thereafter.

I write to express a discomfort marring my high appreciation of you, & thanksgiving to God for you, that for so many you have made & are making the Bible a lively book as well as a living book. My discomfort is the greater because your influence for ill as well as good is great. Not that the ill is great! But in a biblical scholar of great influence, even a 5% abuse of the Bible, admixed with a 95% proper & honorable use, should be a matter of concern.

To be specific about your influence, I heard Paul Sherry (president of the United Church of Christ) say he relies more on your biblical judgment than that of any other biblical scholar. We all appreciate how sincerely & assiduously he is now surveying the mind of our UCC folk, & I fear he'll read the data through the 5% chromatic aberration in the WB specs, which are 95% good. (Demetaphorized, this means I agree with 95% of your handling of Scripture.)....Too, you have great influence on Don McClanen, whose MINISTRY OF MONEY mailings singlemindedly aim to guilt-raise the consciousness of the rich (a worthy cause), at the expense of realism about the poor, balance in Scripture interpretation, & rejection for publication of any critical letters (unworthy supports of his cause). I argued this with Don on Clarence Jordan's porch just before Clarence's goodwife Florence, my goodwife Loree, & I drank the last bottle of scuppernong wine Clarence had made. I got nowhere with him then, nor has he answered my several letters since. He's fundamentalist about his economic analysis, & quotes the Bible against his having to do any further basic thinking on the subject.

But what nettles me more deeply is not anyone you've influenced but rather someone you say has influenced you, viz Norman Gottwald, whom you describe (in your 9 Oct 85 address to the Gen.Bd. of Church & Society for the United Methodist Church, as published pp.52ff Geo. S. Johnson, BEYOND GUILT AND POWERLESSNESS [Aug/89]) as "for this sort of business [viz economics & politics], the most important Old Testament scholar we have." I'm not saying you misrepresent Norman, who '46-'48 was my teaching assistant in Hebrew & Greek & gives me some credit for his radicalization. My reference to him is by way of confessing my own enmeshment, for this half-century since my ordination, in the problematics of the **biblical hermeneutics of ecopolitical power.**

How came I by that address of yours? Don included it with his current MINISTRY OF MONEY mailing. The rest of this Thinksheet is commentary on your addresss, *The Power Monopoly*. (Yes, that address was five years ago. That's what I'm addressing, not where you may be on any of this now--though my impression is that the passage of time is not here relevant: I think your position here has not changed, & would be grateful if you disabuse me.)

A Being familiar with your writings, I know that prophetism is not your only angle on the Bible & that restrictive, zero-sum greed--ie, monopoly--is not, in your view, the prophets' only analysis of social sin. Yet it's fair to have a look at what use you make of the Bible contra "the power monopoly."....An underlying question you & I both are deeply concerned with is "What is 'prophetic' HERE AND now?" That framing of the question constitutes the title of my #1220, which I wrote 1 Nov 78 for our faculty, New York Theological Seminary, as we were struggling toward programs that would answer the question--a process well-described by Bill Webber in his recent history of NYTS, LED BY THE SPIRIT (Pilgrim Press/90). As background for my commentary on your address, I'm doing here something I've never done before: I'm incorporating, in a Thinksheet, an earlier Thinksheet (my mind not having changed on anything therein during these dozen intervening years):

## What is 'prophetic' HERE AND NOW?

1. The most conspicuous form of false prophecy at present is not anything said, but the failure to say what may trigger paying up to the cost of discipleship: SILENCE as the inaction of the false prophet....silence in public and private. This silence takes two forms: (1) failure to "mind," to call to mind (re-mind, in case of those who've heard and have conveniently forgotten), "what the Lord requires" (Mic.6.4), which has been "told" (narrated, in the Story of God's *daver*, his word-nature in action and his word as action) us, at points where human life is in violation of the nature and will of the One in whom the Story centers; and (2) failure to identify the storied One, to "name the Name" in situations in which it might be embarrassing, or worse, to do so. Radicals and liberals commit the second failure, and evangelicals the first. In inauthenitic self-defense, each camp invidiously points to gross failures in the other camp as examples of the internal logic of the rejected position.... and thus "their" false prophecy is used to conceal "our" false prophecy by arrogant self-blinding and self-deafening. So seldom is heard an encouraging word and the skies remain cloudy all day.

2. The prophet, when true (i.e., loyal-to-call), is unfree, under the burden of obedience--paradoxically, most so when reminding of and calling to freedom. This reveals that in biblical religion, freedom is only a relative value: obedience is absolute (a truth picked up in "Islam," the Arab. wd. for "submission" in obedience). Seen negatively, the pressure for freedom is denigrated: Adam & Eve became apple-free from dependence on God in decision-making, and the garden's God chased them out before they could eat from the other tree and become free from death. Biblical religion, with "prophetism" at its heart, aims to keep us dependent on God for life and decision-making: it is pro-freedom only as liberation from internal/external interferences with this dependence--viz., oppressions and "idols"). In starting somewhere else than this, and in winding up somewhere else than in biblical shalom, most so-called "liberation theology" is false prophecying and will bear the bitter fruit of IFD (unrealistic idealism, to frustration, to disintegration). And much argumentation for "liberation theology" turns out to be econpolical conformism--instead of to the current establishment, to the anticipated establishment of a Marxian infra/supra-strucutre: a futuric form of false prophecy, often self-sanctioning by references to the early-and-middle-industral "loss of the working class" by the Church.

3. The true prophet does/doesn't need to be accountable to a community; has courage to speak truth to power as s/he perceives both power and truth; stands up to accusations of being a falseprophet; puzzles out the here-and-now realities in light of the biblical paradigm (=way of seeing and living in the world, in conformity to the Story and obedience to the One whose Story it is); groans toward shalom and cries out against hindrances thereto; would rather be doing something else, but can't because of a compulsion; is uncomfortable to be around, as s/he's never satisfied with how things are; is image-conscious (so, symbolic actions and avoidance of "spoils"); scared (of God and for people); humble; hopeful.

B "Never satisfied" till kingdom come! Unsatisfied with darkness the satisfying light has revealed & is penetrating, & thus a shekinah-shalom satisfied dissatisfaction (with faith & hope), not an unsatisfied dissatisfaction (with cynicism & despair). Without depriving the biblical prophets of their individual visions, it is possible to characterize them as a class act: they were theocentric complainers-announcers.

C Your address, as excepted in Johnson, begins "Peace is the redistribution of power. Any talk about peace that does not face questions of power is unbiblical." The second sentence is true in contexts where the patent or implied antonyms are war, oppression, & the like--true certainly in the context of your address. As for the first sentence, what informs your use of "redistribution"? I think of many instances from the history of socialism--eg, schemes for defeating monopolies, corners, pools, syndicates, trusts, cartels--& everybody knows "From each according to ability, to each according to need." The Bible often complains of maldistribution; but can you honestly make it speak of redistribution in the modern sense, viz the egalitarian reallocation of real & liquid property? While that modern socialist, especially Marxist, dream seems a straightline logical implicate of the biblical understanding of divine & human nature, I find myself using "social suspicion" (your phrase, in another connection) when confronted by instances of eisegeting this modernism into specific biblical texts--eg, the Year of Jubilee, which was a regressive economic scheme for reestablishing the status quo ante, rather than a progressive program of egalitarian justice. (Besides, was it ever tried? Here & there Marxism was tried for up to almost 3/4th of a century, & its general effect was to increase poverty by decreasing economic motivation: bad news to almost everybody, good news to only a very few.)

D I know you mean "Peace is the [just] redistribution of power." (Saddam's expansionism, a la his predecessor Nebucharezzar, has been an all-out effort to bring peace by redistributing power; he thinks his effort is just, you & I don't.) Further, your sentence would make just as good sense if it were to read "War is the redistribution of power"--indeed, almost the only way of power redistribution for at least five millenia (since, according to Riane Eisler's THE CHALICE & THE BLADE, the peace-&-justice-loving Goddess lost out everywhere to the war-&-monopoly-loving gods). I take you to be making a utopian, or at least an idealistic-romantic, statement: if ecopolitical power were equably distributed, there'd be peace, because then the inequable distributions of ecopolitical power that cause the negative feelings that cause war will have been removed. Single-cause thinking is so tempting to intellectuals! Just think what Marx made of class analysis! Human motivation is more complex. Would Saddam's warteeth be extracted if the UN could manage a Middle East "redistribution of power" (whatever that might mean)? Or the Palestinians be content with their "fair share" of land alongside Israel? Aren't efforts toward power redistribution as apt to lead to war as to peace? Or are you speaking eschatologically, that people will peaceably live together under the theocratic redistribution after Michael has hurled into hell all remaining dissidents? Obviously not: as far as I know, you do not pray "Your kingdom come" with any such picture in your head....While I can't make much sense of your first sentence as a general proposition, in context I can see it as meaning that peace comes when a "power monopoly" is broken. This, however, gives precious little meaning to "peace": not fullbodied shalom, but only the dying down of the unquiet caused by complaints of "the poor," contextually defined as those suffering deprivation because of the monopoly's restrictive greed (eg, the rich man taking the poor man's only lamb, 1Sam.12.1-5). But is it true to human nature that unquiet would stay died down? Is it not true that those who get a little justice may want a lot more (increasing justice thus firing revolution), & some of those who become equal become hot to become more than equal? Is not the drive for inequality at least as powerful as the longing for equality?....Really, Walter, I despair of making much sense of your "Peace is the redistribution of power" except to see it as spraying a blue haze over the rest of your address, setting a tone & mood of "social suspicion," in the interest of some unspecified sort of share-the-wealth scheme, or of Robin Hood grab-&-reallocate-the-wealth program, or half-turn-of-the-wheel economic revolution ("first last, last first," a theory whose flaw lies in overrating the character & motives of the last--but which is used by our Lord to powerful hyperbolic-

rnetorical effect in eschatological-theocratic context).

E Monopoly is a fruit of **freedom**. Recent surveys show (1) what motive power freedom has given the human drive for inequality (to be more, know more, have more, do more) here in the West, & (2) how dangerous it is now, in eastern Europe, that this drive, essential to capital accumulation & creativity, has been so long repressed. "In a society where all men are equal, freedom isn't possible," says former gulag prisoner Andrei Sinyavsky in SOVIET CIVILIZATION: A CULTURAL HISTORY (Arcade/90). Your address seems to equate liberation with the defeat of monopoly, and to equate it in another direction with freedom (a word you don't use). This liberation/freedom identification parallels, both in content & in defect, the synonymizing of nonwar with peace. "Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of justice," we learned to say in the movements. But that's true only so long as the justice-lovers are in charge; & that the justice-lovers could be in charge is almost an oxymoron, since the "Justice!" cry is seldom heard except from below. And who wants "liberty & justice for all" when it's read to mean less freedom for those who care little for justice, for a level playingfield, once they have an open field for themselves? (Recent studies show Americans, instead of resenting the rich, emulate them. And Elections '90 revealed this spirit not as soak-the-rich but as don't-tax-me-or-I-can't-get-rich.)

As for the movement's (including your) use of the Exodus story as liberation model, it needs an additional use, viz what happened to the Canaanites after the Israelities got out from under the Egyptians. ("Everywhere we dig we find our ancestors!" said the wife of the portmaster of Haifa to Loree & me as we were having dinner with them. She was not pleased when I said, "And when you dig a little deeper, you find the Canaanites.") The Mendenhall-Gottwald peasant-revolt-+-invaders version commends itself to me, but the official biblical version is that (by divine sanction & even urging) the liberated became oppressors. Yet when the liberated oppressors became themselves again oppressed under a succession of empires, spiritual (as distinct from material) blessings abounded. The complexity can be visualized as a matrix showing liberation as curse/blessing & oppression as blessing/curse. Yes, the complexity must not be used to excuse onself from "the struggle for justice and peace." But liberation theologians would sound more convincing if they seasoned their diatribes with realism about ambiguities, & the humility & humor such realism would open them to.

But is Sinyavsky right in antonymizing equality & freedom? Must the drive for equality lead downward to Marx, then to Lenin, then to Stalin? Isn't it possible to design a political carburetor fine-tuning the mix of equality & freedom as an engine mixes fuel & oxygen? The great experiment is on toward that end, great in that it is now global. While the communist world was gasping for air (freedom), its motor stalling from an excess of fuel (equality), the USA has been suffering from an excess of air, hot air, deregulated-unregulated capitalism, encouraging the abuse of equity in the populace, on Wall St. (Ivan Boesky's "Greed is good," & Michael Milken's becoming a junk-bond billionaire before age 40, & the leveraged-buyout dealers, & the takeover kings, & the S&L buccaneers--all in the permissive anti-regulatory Reaganite atmosphere), & in Congress (porkbarreling, big-contributor favoritism, phony deals for personal nestfeathering, constituency coddling at the expense of the general good).

F Are you a political analyst using the Bible, or a biblical scholar looking at all life, including politics, through the biblical way of seeing, & living in, the world? Not knowing you personally makes the question difficult for me to answer. But your self-presentation, orally & in writing, worries me that you're the former. You seem to me--please accept this not as from an enemy but as from a perplexed friend in your audience--to be politicocentric, not (as is the Bible) **theocentric**.

Yes, I'm aware of the pitfalls here. Some of the lips I read would please me more if they spoke of God less (Mt.15.8 & M.7.6 qt. Is.29.13, which is NRSV has "draw near with their mouths / and honor me with their lips, while their heart is far from me, / and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote"). But I'm equally displeased by those who, for various reasons, underthink & undertalk God, especially scholars of the Book that brims with Godthink & Godtalk.

And I equally resist those who depoliticize-"spiritualize" Scripture & those who

so politicize it as to distract from its theocentricity & thereby fail to feed the Godhunger in the hearts of theological students & of congregations. To the latter I suggest the prayer (from the black spiritual, "I'm so glad trouble don't last alway") "Make more room, Lawd, in my heart for thee." The ex-mainline churches are being sidelined largely, I believe, because they make insufficient room in their hearts (& thus their lives, their worship-programs-mission) for piety (in the good sense), for the practice of the presence of God. In the 1960s we made "the struggle for justice & peace" front & center, & we've stuck with this despite spiritual shifts in the culture. Fred. Streng et al reminded us in the 1960s of THE (eight) WAYS OF BEING RELIGIOUS, but most of the young people who became interested in the mainline churches (esp. our own UCC, yours & mine) did so because of #6, "achievement of human rights through political and economic action," & increasing numbers of that cohort are coming into seminary-&-church leadership.

That's bad? No necessarily. Depends on whether they can be ecumenical about ways of being religious, instead of being parochial about the way they became religious. Scholars Press has just come out with a book that should help here: Eugene V. Gallagher's EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE: EXPLAINING RELIGIOUS CONVERSION. Of course he makes use of the conversion classics, Wm. James' VARIETIES & A.D.Nock's CONVERSION (at whose feet I was privileged to sit). But he makes an advance (1) by describing the motivational matrix of conversion as expressing the convert's notions about the nature, function, & value of religion, & (2) demonstrating how the convert's conversional experience shapes his or her description, analysis, & interpretation of religious phenomena, & thus shapes what the convert expects out of religion for self & others....What's to be done for someone parochial, who doesn't go through the other seven doors? I suggest regular reading of classics written by those whose preferred doors are other than one's own. (Just now, on my ten-minutes-per-book-per-day shelf, is Rich. Baxter's THE SAINTS EVERLASTING REST: as far as possible from the ecopoliticization of the Bible!)

Another way out of parochialism is to ask "how does it [my approach, the door I prefer to go through] define the 'problem' of life? what is the cause of that problem? what is the solution to that problem? what is the way or means of achieving that solution?" (In THE WAYS OF PHILOSOPHY: SEARCHING FOR A WORTHWHILE LIFE, A.L.Herman [Scholars Press/90] surveys fourteen ancient/modern, Eastern/Western thinkers, asking them [via these four questions] Aristotle's question as to the best, most worthwhile life to live.) Now if you, or a reader/hearer of yours (I, eg), were to apply the four questions to WB, what would the answers be? Again, perhaps I don't know your life broadly enough; but from what I do know, the points of tangency where your existence has come to my notice, I'd have to say that you define the "problem" of life as that there's <u>something askew in the ecopolitical arrangements</u>. Just what I'd say also of Marx, who however did not carry the social burden of being a biblical scholar. So what? For one thing, this: many pastors trust you to give them the straight poop on the Bible, & your ecopolitical twist distorts their understanding & message. Just today, eg, a pastor handed me something he'd written against the UCC Book of Worship's "forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." Says he, "Brueggemann finally gave specific expression," in FINALLY COMES THE POET (pp.103f), that (in that pastor's mind) argues for retaining "debts": "Debts serves as a form of social power whereby some remain hopelessly in bondage to others. Israel understood the powerful dehumanizing tendency of a credit society (cf. Deut.15:1-18). The great saving event of forgiveness is debt cancellation whereby the poor are permitted to reenter the public life of this community as respected participants" (so today the church faces the issue how to adjudicate debts/credits). That pastor happens to be a faithful reader of his Greek NT & is noted for careful biblical exegesis, but he used you here to tilt toward literalism ("debts," rather the REB's translation of the metaphor [in Mt.6.12 & L.11.4] as "wrongs"--which I consider not strong enough, so prefer "sins," which L. has in his distich's first line: Mary recently received a long Thinksheet from me on this). As for your bad-mouthing of "a credit society," have you developed a-<u>non</u>credit-society economic theory? To use Deut.15 (the Year of Jubilee), which is a sophisticated intracommunal

compassionate adjustment of a "social power" factor in "a credit society" (as the USA has done, especially since 1933)--to use this as though it were an anticapitalist text is to abuse Scripture. (Some time ago I scowled where I saw you do this in a SOJOURNERS article. Maybe that scowl was the beginning of this Thinksheet.) Further, the passage combines, with Deuteronomic compassion, a Machiavellian savvy: (1) lend (so you can "rule over"), but don't borrow (lest you be ruled over); (2) do them (foreigners), but not us (Jews); (3) if at the seventh year a slave doesn't want freedom, secure permanent possession of him/her. What was good about the scheme, whether or not it was ever tried, was that it provided a way for those who'd fell off the Good Ship Capital to get back on board (as American banks are now doing vis-a-vis south-of-the-border loans). The stupid socialist answer was to sink the ship....Am I a defender of capitalism? Of course not: I'm an alternative-society kingdom-of-God Christian. Am I an anticapitalist? Of course not, but you seem to be, & that pastor gets into unnecessary trouble by being, & you help him to be. (I've had conversation, & correspondence, with the other prominent-biblical-scholar Walter, Wink, on this aberration--who spooks up his anticapitalism with "principalities & powers," but it comes down to the same thing. So much of current liberal Protestant prophetism has a musty Marxist smell, as has Hispanic & other Third World liberation theology. Because of my radicalism I was widely accused of it during my decade on UCBHM, but was not guilty: my U. of Chicago economics studies protected me from facile & fatuous anticapitalism. Capitalism, I've long held, is the worst economic arrangement, except all the others; its the best for creating wealth, & none are good at distributing it, & [Juvenal] "luxury is more ruthless than war.")

G Your address gratuitously exercises "social suspicion" as to "How come Egypt had so much bread?" (Gn.12) Astonishing, for a scholar who's written a book about THE LAND! Famine in the Negev, but no failure of the Nile; but you simply have to have an ecopolitical explanation so you can give monopoly another kick! And you press your luck by saying that the passage represents Israel teaching their "boys and girls to learn...that there is something wrong with social monopolies"! Such exegesis is at the level of ignorant fundamentalists, though at the opposite ecopolitical pole.

H Gn.47 tells how the Egyptian government gave "the best part of the land" of Goshen to some starving foreign shepherds, later providing them with free seed on condition of a 20% tax on the harvest, an arrangement under which they "became rich and had many children." Not at all bad, as ancient Near Eastern governments went. Yes, in the process, the government became totalitarian, by economic centralism owning everything (call it state capitalism, another name for communism; Thatcher has reduced national ownerships by 80%). Now what does doctrinaire WB make of Gn.47? You say it "deals with the questions: 'How did we get into this mess?' 'How did I get into this monopoly where some people have too much and some people don't have anything?' And there it is said: We got into it because our brother, or our alienated brother, Joseph, was a smart guy and he bought up all the land for Pharoah." My, how you do eisegete! None of that is in Gn.47! Maybe there was a better way to save the people from starvation than economic centralism, but you & I wouldn't know--or do you think you do? For you, "monopoly" is an unrelievedly dirty word. For me, it wouldn't seem to be often the best among the options, but I'm too much of a situationalist to be dogmatically against it. Or against empire. Or even colonialism.

I You well say that Ex.1-15 begins with "the cry of oppression" & ends with "the dance of liberation." The Lord saw & saved (chaps.2f). Then this jargony sentence: "This model of peace believes that the cries of those who are excluded from the monopoly mobilize the power of justice in heaven to rearrange things." The people were in charge of the "mobilization," contra the divine initiative? And what got "rearranged"? Not the Pharonic monopoly, though one Goshen people got away from it. And this: "The [Ex.] narrative is the enactment of the redistribution of...goods" (in a previous sentence, "the redistribution of goods and the power and the access." What redistribution? Some redistribution when they returned to Canaan & created monopolies against the Canaanites. Almost no redistribution of Egyptian goods to them when they left Egypt. Land redistribution, as we know now in the Third World & increasingly in the Second World, is the most important form of wealth redistribution;

& the Israelites got not a square foot of Egypt. All they got were some portable valuables, "gold and silver jewelry and...clothes" (12.35). This paltry haul is what you elevate into "the redistribution of goods"! If you mean that as a transportable model, landowners today can easily buy off the poor with what for them are trifles, & succeed in this anger-depotentiating antirevolutionary activity.

My conclusion is that you need to find texts that better fit your sermon, but are not likely to find them in the Bible, else you'd've used them in your address instead of the ones you lamely do use.

My complaint is twofold:

1 That you sometimes use, loosely & even fallaciously, the sanctions of antiquity & of sacred text, &

2 That in so doing, you (a) give the impression that your message is the message of Scripture (which it only marginally is), & (b) fail to present & re-present the central biblical message, which is theocentricity-theocracy, not a particular "note" in God's character (in your emphasis, justice). (Do I think justice important? Last year, your wife, as on the Craigville Colloquy committee, got 47 Thinksheets of mine on "Justification & Justice.")

J Your address was titled (by you?) "The Power Monopoly." Here are some monopoly situations I wonder what you'd say about:

1 1945-7, the USA's nuclear monopoly. Was the world better off when the USSR broke that monopoly? If you say no, then it's only some monopolies you don't like: you're not categorically against them. (Not every "power monopoly" is economic.)

2 Saddam's dream of developing a Middle Eastern oil monopoly, giving him control of an estimated 80% of the world's residual oil. Assuming you want to see his dream die, do you favor the food monopoly, the international sanctions, now tightening as a noose around his neck?

3 Do you oppose, as I do, the view that the "squatter's rights" principle gives a people monopoly control over subsurface resources? That's the reverse of the "finders keepers" principle, according to which the USA owns all the oil Arabs are sitting on, as it was our technology that discovered the oil & both developed & managed its production (till the Arabs stole it from us, by expropriation). Rejecting also this principle, I go by the-earth-is-the-Lord's principle: the oil belongs to everybody & should accordingly be in the hands of an everybody's rep, possibly under the UN. Effectuating this, however, would require a highly mobile & energetic UN military force, which then would have a monopoly of violence: do you believe the planet needs a well-managed monopoly of violence, or do you prefer the present diversification of violence? (Of course we both prefer nonviolence; but that's seldom an option "within the conditions of history," as the saying goes.)

4 Do you favor the establishment of an armed (instead of only policed) Palestinian state, or do you think it's better to continue with Israel's military monopoly in the area?

5 The point of patents & copyrights is to motivate to, and reward with monopoly protection, individual creative achievement. Do you believe in this mind monopoly? It's reward is not just protection but also power. Is this form of "power monopoly" good? If so, are there other power monpolies you like? In the information age, "knowledge is power" more than ever before: power over sand (silicon chips & fiber optics) & therethrough power over land (less than in the past, with the aid of armies). Patents & copyrights feed the American love of inequality, putting us way out in front in invention & innovation, esp. in new generations of computer hard- & soft-ware.

6 Should the present nuclear club be exclusive, enforcing a post-1947 nuclear monopoly? This would demand smashing, for the second time (first time, Israel in 1981), Saddam's nuclear potential, which has reached, or at least is near, warhead production. Or do you prefer nuclear proliferation? Saddam may find some comfort in our UCC national office's trying to get us to wire the White House, "Mr. President, do not go to war with Iraq." I find it not comforting but only embarrassing. I trust God, not my government or my church. I pray daily for both: my ignorance as to what to do is no impediment before the throne of grace.

Grace & peace, Willis