

The sermon in the Craigville Tabernacle this morning was on shoes (Moses' being commanded, by the Voice from the burning bush, to take off his [Ex.3]--& getting no further revelation till his was barefoot). To begin the Talk-Back of the preacher (my pastor, Joan Cianci), I asked "Where else in the Bible are we commanded to take off our shoes?" Immediately a tenured professor of German & Swahili said "John 13: we are to wash one another's feet." I: "In our church we did that once; it was a Maundy Thursday. When do you do it in your church [The Church of God in Jesus Christ, which began as storefronts]?" He: "Whenever the Spirit moves." Said another (in substance), "When our church tried footwashing, a man whose brain can barely process language, & who never comes to worship, to our astonishment presented himself for footwashing." The conversation meandered all over the field of footwear as carrying symbolic freight--expensive Nikes on a consumerized poor youth; "I got shoes....gonna walk all over God's heaven"; a church in which, since its 1820 founding, nobody's preached with shod feet [yes, because of Ex.3];....

Think through the above, asking yourself "Where, if anywhere here, do I think the conversation had to do with what I personally would consider **revelation**?"

1 As you know, one can see through one-way glass only from one side. A committed, concerned Christian can see through the Book of Revelation & can feel through it even more than see--can feel, more than understand, 1.5 ("Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth"). But from the outside, from the other side, Revelation is impenetrable, a mere verbal soup of garish images. Be clear: To whatever extent you are a Christian, you are an insider to the Book of Revelation. It's yours. Act like an insider. Assume you know what's going on, & be surprised where you don't--& determined to find out.

2 Is Revelation revelation? As an insider, you say "Yes" & then proceed, on the basis of this assumption, to explore what's being "unveiled" (the lit. meaning of the book's original [Gk.] name, "Apocalypse," uncovering; unveiling comes from the Lat. tr., "re-vel-ation")....The contemporary Jewish saint-scholar Abe Heschel put this insider assumption bracingly: "Torah is the answer. We must, each of us, recover the question." You feel the reversal-shock: Our ordinary way of coming at religion is to assume that we have the questions we want religion to answer. That gives us the initiative, the divine being passive. But in biblical religion, God has the initiative, reveals himself & his will, & expects us to come up with questions that fit his revelation: Our position is not active but secondary, **reactive**. Moses reacted to the vision (the bush described, over the main arch of the Jewish Theological Seminary, by two Hebrew words, "BURNING, NOT-BURNING-UP") & then, after removing his sandals, to the audition, his hearing the Voice from the bush.

3 The Book of Revelation is by somebody who was seeing things (i.e., having visions) & hearing things (i.e., having auditions). Take your choice: He was crazy or inspired. We insiders say "Inspired," "In-Spirit-ed," receiving what Quakers historically have called "openings" (Rev.1.4 NRSV: "I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open!"). While he was going about his business, which was peripatetic pastoring, something happened to him that told him something was about to happen to him, to the Church, to the world. (The sense of imminence, of something about to happen, is keen in me as I write these words: I can hear the first sounds of Hurricane Edouard, 100mph winds, approaching me.)

4 A precondition of your "getting" the Book of Revelation is your slowing down & taking the time to get into it. Before worship this morning, I gave a friend the final couplet of Wm. Henry Davies' "Leisure": "A poor life this if, full of care, / We have no time to stand and stare." (The poem begins "What is this life if, full of care, / We have no time to stand and stare?") When in Talk-Back we were talking about Moses' standing & staring at the burning bush, my friend handed me back the 3x5 & said, "Read this," which then I did. Please, therefore, stop your hurrying about & take time to **stare** at the Book of Revelation!

5 Friday evening we took two hours to sit & stare at Russia's most famous living poet, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, as he did poetry in our Wellfleet UCC church. He did it in Russian & English all over the place, up & down the isles, on his knees &

jumping & shouting & whispering. He *was*, his total being was, poetry, his poetic message of courageous-compassionate humanity. Was it a revelation? Certainly it was a revelation of the power language can convey. And his passionate, joyful presentation was revelation in a deeper sense, as in a poem in which Jesus Christ transcends human divisions. He was hopeful, as in his reading a chapter from his Random-House-to-be-published DON'T DIE BEFORE YOU ARE DEAD. And he was realistic: "Revolutions are thought up by utopians, brought to fruition by fanatics, and exploited by scoundrels." Some hopes should die, but "Love means you are not dead" (says a character who, rediscovering love, releases his pet porcupine in hope the critter will find another porcupine). His "Babi Yar," which Norman Mailer read after speaking about Y.Y.'s benevolent political influence, shows him deeply committed to justice even when it involves great personal risk. And he's trustfully accepting of life's complexity: In "The City of Yes and the City of No" he concludes, after trying to live in each city, that his proper place is in between, "stretched taut like a wire." Y.Y. has the imagination, the passion, the compassion of Jn. the Revelator, whom he can help us understand.

6 The expression "**verbal images**" is almost an oxymoron, for it means to see through the ear (in a largely preliterate constituency, early Christian literary communication being mainly through public reading, which is what the Book of Revelation is intended for). The nonverbal imagery of music, the universal language, illumines what I'm saying. In the Craigville Tabernacle eight evenings ago I heard the premiere of Andrew Buffington's "Peacock, Suite for Piano" (played by himself). Your eyes having experienced peacocks, through your ears you could "see" them in the seven movements of this long, delightful piece. And then of course there's the ear/eye merger in song, as in the hymn "Be thou my vision," which we sang in worship this morning (PILGRIM HYMNAL 391 [bowdlerized as 451 in THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL, which has added "Mother" & dropped "Lord," the mutual divine/human indwelling, & the political metaphoric base in Irish history ["High King"]--an instance of what one reviewer called the "me Tarzan you Jane" hamhanded prosody of this mindlessly inclusive-language-for-God songbook)....The Thinksheet preceding this one bears the title "The Bible's Last Book SINGS!" Read as its author intended, the Book of Revelation is to be seen & heard: it is verbal images of sight & sound.

7 Because of its (to us) outlandish **language**, the Book of Revelation sharply raises the revelation/words question: Granted that God's revelation comes *through* the words of the Bible, is revelation *in* some of them (so that we lose some of revelation if we lose those words)? The right-wing answer is that we lose some of revelation if we lose *any* of the words. That radical position is "verbal inspiration" or "inerrancy." The left-wing answer is that we lose none of the revelation even if we change *all* of the words. That radical position may be called "metaphorism": all language is metaphorical &, as such, translatable ("In other words,....")......**Exercise:** Assuming you're somewhere in between these extremes, what words in Revelation are, for you, indispensable, essential for communicating God's revelation? You might list them, or just underline them. Why your selections?

8 What's going on on the earth has a **heaven-mirror** counterpart. By looking into the mirror, which is focused on the near future, Jn. could see symbolically what was to happen "soon" (1.1, whose verbs could be trd. "point out to," "happen," & "sign" [the 3rd having the root of Eng. "semasiology"/"semantics"--the study of signs/ meanings]). G.B.Caird thinks 1.19 does not present a time-sequence outline of the book (though I used that for distributing the Rev.-hymns in #2806) (300-1, THE REVELATION OF ST.JOHN [H&R/66]): "Jn.'s doc. of salvation, like that of the NT as a whole, is in three tenses. But it is characteristic of his visions that the tenses are constantly interfused. Already when the Lamb receives the scroll of destiny, the whole creation joins in the worship of heaven (5.13)....The victory of the martyrs is already included in the victory of the Cross by which Satan is ejected from heaven (12.11)....There is no puzzle if we share Jn.'s faith that the end is not an event but a person, the first and the last (22.13). Jn.'s book begins on the Lord's Day and ends in eucharistic worship; and it is in the setting of worship that his eschatology is to be understood....Week by week their prayer *Maranatha*, 'Come, Lord Jesus, was answered as they kept their tryst with him who was Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.'"