This is an expansion of a memorial-service tribute to Harmon Bro, 9.20.97

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JOYFUL WHOLENESS IN A BROKEN SAD WORLD

The Rev.Dr. June Bro has asked me to reminisce about her beloved, & I thank her for this opportunity to do so.

1 At the University of Chicago 56 summers ago I met two eager & brilliant MKC's just fresh out of college. (For those of you in other occupations than religion, I should explain than an MKC is a missionaries' kid from China.) Often I went to lunch with them, thanking God for their abounding spiritual, mental, & physical energy & enjoying confounding them (for by that time I had three earned degrees in religion & believed I could bless them real good by puncturing their still adolescent negatives about my settled adult religion, namely, Protestant libergelicalism, on which I am still settled). (For those of you not into religious jargon, I should explain that libergelicals have their heads on the left & their hearts on the right. Or to put it so as not to sound like an anatomical monstrosity, we wed liberal thinking to biblical, canonical, classical Christian orthodoxy, the teaching that God came into the world & we killed him & he didn't stay dead & now in the Spirit offers us all forgiveness of sin & fullness of life here & hereafter.)

2 One of those MKCs was a philosopher & the other a mystic. Each went on to author a stack of books, & they remained friends through the years--& were together as recently as last month. You may have seen Bill Moyer's six-segment PBS interview of him on the world's religions: Huston Smith has always been in philosophy of religion, & wrote the most influential book ever on the world's religions, originally titled THE RELIGIONS OF MAN, now bowdlerized as THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS.

As for the mystic MKC, we have gathered here now to honor his memory & thank God for his life & his ministry in mysticism, prayer, & spiritual healing. Both MKCs were gentlemen, gentle men, but the mystic stands out in my long memory as the more open & attentive to points of view other than his own. Harmon had an intellectual generosity to match his intellectual & spiritual curiosity, & I experienced it right up to three Sundays ago when he commented on the long list of questions he wanted to discuss with me from reading my most recent Thinksheets.

3 Yes, three Sundays ago. June & Harmon, Loree & I had a grand two-hour conversation three Sundays ago at our church Sunday School picnic. Two hours, in spite of his having three ministrokes during the previous night. We spoke of those long-ago Chicago days, teachers, friends, our being in the University of Chicago octet, I the second tenor & he (whose musicianship far outpaced mine) the baritone. Always, through his explorations of the inner world, the great music of the church, the great hymns & anthems, kept him from wandering too far away from the Faith. And he was radiant when he told us that Huston the philosopher has now returned to the exploration & practice of his own religion, & particularly for him the centrality of the Cross of Christ as God's ultimate expression of vulnerable love for humanity. Harmon always rejoiced when the fragments were gathered up, when wholeness reappeared in this broken, sad world. And he was early to spy bright shoots of hope pushing their way up through darkness into the light--a seeing, & a foreseeing, based on the lifelong conviction that God, who is MORE THAN WE ARE, steadily intends each of us to become more than we have become. (His mother wrote a devotional classic of that title, MORE THAN WE ARE--a splendid work I've often recommended down through the decades.) Though he was impatient that people become more than we are, he had an active respect for us all, for all human beings, just as we are.

4 I miss Harmon, & shall miss him; but I am comforted by two convictions. The first is that **in God**, no good is ever lost. And the second is that **in Christ**, through his life & death & resurrection, we Christians have a living hope in the resurrection made possible for us by his resurrection. In the hospital, not many days before he died, I looked into his eyes & said, "Jesus, the sun of righteousness, has arisen with healing in his wings." Those were the last words he heard from me other than words of prayer as we--June & Loree & our son Mark & I--joined hands with his hands in a circle around his bed. The gates of new life have now opened for him, & for this we thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

NOTE: On p2 of this Thinksheet (over), I've said more about those last words. +

"**Jesus**, the **sun** of righteousness, has arisen with healing in his wings" is an early Christian adaptation of a sentence in the last chapter of the Old Testament--Malachi 4.2 (NRSV: "the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings). The image--the winged solar disk--was a familiar one in the ancient Near East, esp. in Egypt & Mesopotamia, so we're not surprised to find it in the Bible. The last of the biblical prophets uses it here as a metaphor for the coming of the Day of the Lord, when the divine "righteousness" (rightness, rightingness, justice) will settle scores, restore the victory of order over chaos, return the creation to the rule of shalom (the peace & prosperity of his worshipers), & remove the curse with the blessings of a renewed earth (& even, in Revelation 21.1, "a new heaven").

Just before I quoted the Christian adaptation to him, I reminded Harmon that during our two-hour Sunday School picnic conversation, I'd alluded to my current studying of the Egyptian Book of the Dead. In the hospital, I'd said, "Harmon, you & I share a love of the world's sacred scriptures. At the picnic, I spoke to you of the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Would you like me to read something from it now?" Immediately, & with as much of a smile as he could manage, he shook his head "Yes." So I read of the supreme Egyptian deity, Ra, appearing each morning in the east as the winged sun or (alternatively) in a golden boat in which the devotees prayed to be sailors under command of the deity whose limbs are all the lesser deities--the high god "Who holds you in his hand, but whom no hand / Can ever hold; who knows your name and season... / For whom the days return in constant passing, / Moving in splendor toward the end of time." Much of this Egyptian/Mesopotamian nature-mysticism was taken up into, & transformed in, the biblical God.

In Psalm 19, the sun has not a golden boat but a tent (v.4) which it exits in the morning & enters at night, in its course observing all (like the sun-god) in the interest of justice (which segues from God's glory in nature to his glory in torah-"law" --vv.7-13; followed by the great prayer, v.14). And in Ps.84.11, "the LORD God is a sun...." But nowhere in Scripture is the sun worshiped: God is worshiped through the sun, as all of nature is transparent of his presence & purpose. And finally the sun is unnecessary (Rev.21.23, 22.5): God is the light; the Lamb the lamp (Is.60.19-20).

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