

"WHERE ARE YOU (COMING) FROM?"

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

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Having just returned from leading a retreat in a Catholic monastery (Mount Savior, Elmira, NY), I'm alive to the permutations of this Thinksheet's title. You could read it (1) the simplest way [without the ()] as "Where do you live, & left to come to this retreat?" It's always a getacquainted fun-question. Or (2) "Where were you born / did you grow up?" That's a what-do-you-say-after-you-say-hello question #2. Or (3) "Where did your family come from (eg, in Europe or Africa or Japan)?" Or (4, the question this Thinksheet's about) [with the ()] "What is your **central commitment**, the home of your heart, from which you go out to see & greet all else, 'the world'?....What occasions this Thinksheet, which is an open letter to my fellow retreatants of last weekend (persons of extraordinary cultural privilege, among whom I include leading monks of that monastery), is my sense that I should try to tell them, so far as I now may be able, **who it was that they spent the weekend with.**

Dear fellow retreatant,

1. I thank God & you for the privilege of last weekend with you, & I write this letter to you as a form of prayer for you as you continue your inner/outer journey through & beyond the world. I'd not have been worth your time & money had I been unable to add both sun & storm to your "inner weather," & I hope both will bless you (as Billy Graham likes to say) "real good."

2. I hope you grasped that my opinions, like my Thinksheets, were meant not as propaganda but as stimuli to your own personal process of opinion-formation. (If you failed to grasp that, you wasted your money on me.) I am committed to making disciples, but not to myself. Myself, I'm a throwaway as far as you're concerned; gone from you, soon gone from history. Yet for you I am an abiding *depositum interiorum*, from time to time calling up feelings-images-ideas of storm & sun. Considering this my style, I hope it doesn't bother you that nothing, no subject, no issue, got fleshed out, rounded out, finished. Give me this: I have the courage of incompleteness, of loose ends. My defense is that so does human life; so does history, whose gates are open to what God wants to give us, our children, & our children's children "unto the last generation." Having encouraged you both before & during the retreat to tell me what you wanted to work on, I dealt with it all in ways that (a) honored my convictions while aiming to (b) "stir up your pure minds" (to use a K.J.Version phrase). Who were you with? Socrates the gadfly (stinging insect: *ὄϊστρος*, *estrus*, whence cometh the female hormones ["estrogens"], though how you get from stinging insects to women no male etymologist would be wise to speculate). Face it, folks: being with Socrates wasn't & isn't entirely pleasant for anybody, including Socrates. Socrates not only fails to observe the pieties, the cozy life-conclusions a cohort or ingroup uses for mutual confirmation & as shibboleths to exclude; s/he also attacks as prejudices (unexamined tenets) the ingroup's convictions. (One cause of anger at Socrates is his conviction--prejudice?--that the ingroup's convictions are prejudices, ie unexamined opinions. Which of course is almost never entirely true & is sometimes even mainly untrue: Socrates needs, for sorting his prejudices out from his convictions, to hear the anger, but usually hears too little of it because people (1) are taught to be "nice" & (2) want to be safe instead of vulnerable, which expressing their anger makes them [thinking that while repressing anger is bad for their health, expressing it is worse].)....But all that was Socrates' **masculine** side (the Greek word for stinging insect being masculine): let's turn to his **feminine** side, the midwife (*μαιουρία*, "mautria," feminine). We Socratics (mirabile dictu!) are more feminine than masculine. We know that the stinging insect is not a progenerative phallus: our notions are not "where it's at." The original Socrates admitted being a stinging insect but rejoiced in being a midwife, which was how he got his jollies. (My frequent prayer, in teaching & counseling, is this: "Lord, help me help bring to birth what your Spirit has sired, as Jesus in the Virgin Mary." [Please don't hang yourself up on the imagery!]) Something is struggling to be born, & God has me here to help in the birth process.

3. Who was that you spent the weekend with? John Baptist. A wilderness voice crying "Prepare the Lord's way!" Reread Ps.84¹ & remember my exposition of it: I am deeply concerned for the quality both of your yearning & of your singing. Unlike the Zen master, who seeks to shock from nonsense by nonsense to sense, I seek to shock from sense into better sense, crying "Repent!" of your lesser sense & "Believe!" in the more appropriate paradigm toward "the Kingdom [Reign-Realm] of God." (Are you sputtering at what you think my self-inflation in comparing myself with Socrates & Jn. Baptist? Rather, consider my humility: S. saw himself as Athens' most ignorant citizen, & J.B. his significance only that of a pointer. I prick the balloon of the inflated humility our goy culture teaches--which is one of the roots of antijudaism, as the yids don't have this hangup....And did you notice that while Jesus is my central model, the two models I've bespoke here are one a goy & the other a yid? Our Bible, our civilization, is a stranding of the two. To compensate for the fact that the church is overweighted on the Greek side, in preaching-teaching-counseling I put more weight on the Jewish side. That's why you got all the Hebrew & all those stories, first- & second-hand, about Jews.)

4. "Where is Willis coming from?" You had trouble figuring me out, didn't you? More radical than most liberals. More orthodox than most conservatives. More antifundamentalist than most secularists. More secular than most of the pious. "From one opinion of his, you can't guess the others." True, because my convictions do not have mutual coherence--any more than do the branches of a tree (but reread Robt. Frost's "Tree at My Window"). "It's even harder to see where he's going than where he's coming from." Correct; but if you suspend those two questions, you'll get more out of what I'm here-&-now up to. Which translates as "Trust me!" Which, on the short exposure of a mere weekend, you're not sure is a good idea....So you probably left more confused than clear. Which is better than false clarity about me & my opinions & what I'm up to.

5. But I dropped powerful clues as to where I was coming from. Remember our study of the two God-stories with which the Bible begins: the first being a devolution from man (the garden being created after Adam & slipped in under him) & the second the reverse, an evolution to man. View the two as origins-stories & together they make nonsense. Why? So we'll get the point: not "in the beginning" what or how but "in the beginning, God...." It's the simplest way of stating where both the Bible & Willis are coming from. Of course according to our biblical paradigm, we all "came from" God in the sense that God is our source. But in the metaphorical sense, to "come from" the biblical God means to do your feeling-thinking-living in cyclical consciousness, "praying without ceasing" in the sense that the journey outward from the thought of God swiftly yoyos back in a journey inward to the thought of God & to "attending unto God" (to use a phrase dear to French Christian spirituality). The biblical God is my tree-trunk, in relation to which my images-ideas are in dynamic coherence as the branches (the branches not systematically cohering among themselves).

6. Something else peculiar here: like you, I have a very individual lover's quarrel with (in all senses!) where I come from. Indeed, that is the third factor making me the individual I am (the other two being my genotype [unique genes/hormones] & where [in all senses] I'm coming from). Further, vis-a-vis Scripture, God has given me the privilege of acquiring three freedoms: in the Bible, to know it (reading it daily for more than ½ c. in the original languages + Latin + a modern language); with the Bible, to use it extensively & flexibly in life & ministry; & from the Bible, to disagree with it where, on the best grounds I can, I believe God is telling me I must. Everyone's existential "canon" (the Bible as personally used, which is always smaller than the entire Bible) is where, biblically, one comes from. As a biblical theologian, I am professionally, competently, aware, vis-a-vis Scripture, both of where I am & where I'm not coming from--& in both cases, why. This gives depth, breadth, & (hard to take!) complexity to my discourse. You spent last weekend with a God-infatuated, Scripture-saturated Christian. (Is my self-description lacking one further adjective, viz "self-infatuated-&-saturated"? Possibly, but that

would not detract from the objectivity of the other two adjectives. We are, all of us, God's defective, distorted, deformed children; & in my case, I have a fairly good fix on those three adjectives....& I hope each of you has in hisr case....(Lexical note: While it's being pushed with vigor in our liberal churches, inclusive language is fading in secular publishing &, somewhat less, in the electronic media. Ugly things like "s/he" & "hisr" & even (though less) "they/their/them" as generic singular are fading, & sex-unknown animals are reverting from the impersonal "it/its/it" to the old personal "he/his/him." I was among the first to attack a bowdlerized, inclusive-language lectionary & Bible; I'll be among the last to return completely to the generic "he/his/him." Indeed, I hope the return is never complete. But in speaking & writing, I'm rigorously inclusive-language: people have enough reasons for shunning my message without my adding another. As for the biblical God as "he/his/him," I'm ambivalent: avoiding it so as to avoid unnecessary offense, but knowing that it's a lost cause, as the biblical God is ineluctably masculine not only in word but also in deed: the Protagonist of the biblical story is as masculine as Adam-Abraham-Moses-Jesus.)

7. Products of the human mind help us understand human beings, for they mirror us. Harvey saw a land-irrigation system, & leapt to ("discovered") the heart-pumping circulation of our blood. The computer is only beginning its reflex illumination of our neuronal system, including our brain (but somewhat less our "mind"). Even a small knowledge of the computer helps a person observe the "programming" (as process & content) of hisr & others' minds....You experienced, & may have observed, that my dendritic development has me thinking-speaking-writing in sets (a noun for which RHD² gives 111 meanings!), verbal & visual patterns. Let's take an example of each: (1) Verbal. Every retreat-leader you have comes with something to propose which s/he is ready (a) to present as persuasively as s/he knows how & (b) to protect from naysayers as insistently as s/he is able. Sometimes you know before a retreat what its leader's "thing" is going to be; sometimes it turns out to be something else, & you have to get your critical consciousness going (what's going on? what's really hisr thing? how is s/he trying to persuade me to it? how is s/he protecting it from present & other possible naysayers?--all this essential to hermeneutics, interpretation, of both situations & texts). Now, my wordprocessor knows only 200,000 words, all English. But English is three-storey + basement, with simple grammar but the world's richest lexicon. Our basement is Gmc (Germanic), which has words of (1) high energy (eg, God, shit) & (2) wide meaning--in both ways, comparable to Hebrew, whose influence on English is far less than I'd like. Let's call the first floor simply English. The second is Latin (Latinate words in English) & the third is Greek (coming into English more through Latin than directly), whose sophistication in English is higher than Latin's but whose energy is lower....Now, when your fellow-retreatant, Rusty Roy, was growing up in India, some of his sentences were mixes of Bengali/Hindi/English, for his soft warm gray computer had been programmed to select from the three lexica the words most to the purpose. His "set" was trilingual. Me, I select words from all levels of the house I've grown up in. I prefer our gutsy Gmc (less accurately called "Anglo-Saxon") but throw in L. & G. to enrich my palette & resonances. (Example: Gmc "talk," L. "converse," G. "dialog.") Let's apply this to (above) the three actions of anyone leading you in a retreat. (The first diagonal represents the transition from Gmc to L.; the second, L. to G.) A leader comes to you to witness or herald / announce or testify or proclaim or promulgate or preach or propagate / present a thesis (to make known being Gmc from both L. & G.). I laid all that on you, right? The pattern way my mind works, I am able to "access" (ugly computerese!) the levels with the furnishings (words) on each & to do so consciously (again, compare a painter or a composer). All that is proposal; &, to put it in one word, my proposal to you was theocentricity, the centering of our inner & outer journeys in the biblical God. Now, a presenter seeks to be as persuasive as able, using metaphor-image-story-argument while endeavoring to protect hisr "thing" from naysayers--to guard / defend / be an apologist for the core of the presentation. I must add one more action: often the presenter, instead of just being defensive, will carry the attack to the enemies, the yessayers to something else that makes them naysayers to the

presenter's thing. "Nice," "loving," positive-thinking people are turned off by it, not realizing that dynamically, apologetics & polemics are a continuum. (Eg, in parenting, you teach your children who we aren't & why, as well as who we are & why.) So you found me not only guarding/defending/apologizing but also hitting, attacking / combatting / polemicizing as an antagonist. You may find this third action of a leader both uncivil & neurotic (as under the influence of "negative emotions"): I hold these findings to be sick, antidemocratic, & dangerous (eg, as prone to antisemitism [against Jews & Arabs])....My inner computer, while I'm speaking or writing, quickly accesses, through their denotata & connotata, such **word-sets** from the basement & floors of the language-house I live in. You may have noticed that occasionally, though rarely, I turn inward, go on a search, monolog for a minute or two to develop a fresh insight; that often I roll out at all levels a developed insight; & that sometimes I speak in basement monosyllables, the simple Gmc tongue some find too stark & blunt. Now to illustrate the other (2), **sight-sets**, the visual patterns in thinking-speaking-writing. Here on Cape Cod there's a flap going on over CCT in the Provincetown Elementary School, CCT emphasizing "creative, critical thinking" (method rather than content). CCT, to use older terms, means logic, linear-rational cognition (left-brain), + the poetic-intuitive leaps of metaphor (right-brain). For me, every metaphor is an invitation to explore (cp. Susan Sontag's PHOTOGRAPHY AS METAPHOR and AIDS AS METAPHOR), & you experienced me circling & sniffing at word-pictures. (Call that Sarah's hora-dance, & call the former Abraham's journey....yes, & call the latter masculine & the former feminine.) Children, anybody, can become skilled at processing the few mind-patterns. You experienced me (a) standing an idea on its head, reversing it; (b) negating a positive expression & turning a negative into a positive; (c) transposing terms between two sentences; & (d) gridding--which here is my illustration: remember the grid for exploring (x axis) visible/invisible vis-a-vis (y axis) mystical/rational?

So that you could sense this as an invitation to adventure, to intellectual-spiritual exploration, I merely suggested some placements: creation spirituality in A (as AC is immanent-feminine, BD being transcendent-masculine), scientism (including evolutionism, in contrast to evolution) in B, celibacy in C, & philosophy in D. For yourself, use the grid to explore further these four boxes, then also the six combinations. (When confronted with two sets of two terms each, my mind automatically throws them onto this simplest grid; & I close my eyes & work on the ten possibilities on the "window" or "field." Scores of Thinksheets are explorations using this grid, which aids clarity, coherence, & comprehensivity [leaving out nothing relevant--though sometimes, for this, I discover I need a third dimension].)

	mystical	rational
visible	A	B
invisible	C	D

8. As among the arts only dance uses the whole body (the larynx excepted), so in communication only **story** addresses our whole being. So I use many prose stories & story poems. So the Bible is story--its trunk, God's story (creation-fall-redemption-consummation); its branches, hundreds of human stories which, unseen in relation to the trunk, would appear as unrelated as a tree's branches if seen without seeing the trunk. A false scruple (which I do not have) against self-referencing keeps some speakers-writers from using first-hand, primary stories, the liveliest kind, the kind that communicates best; but I have some sympathy, for many of the hearers-readers are crippled by the same scruple & resent a speaker-writer who is not. People are the big show, & your story is the biggest & best thing you have to show no matter how crooked. (Yes, W.H.Auden: "You shall love your crooked neighbor / with your crooked heart.")

9. Remember some of my unorthodox ways of getting at Bible study? Understanding the Bible is very like understanding each other: encoding/decoding, sending world / receiving world, author/reader (for which we used Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat"). Merging/clashing assumptions of author/reader. Digging-tool questions to get through the biblical surface. Curiosity-killing slogans--generalizations which, remaining unexamined, have acquired idolatrous sacrality & become prejudices.

We worked on the mind-deadening slogan of the farmer on the other side of the wall from Robt. Frost ("Mending Wall"): "Good fences make good neighbors"--which, since it was good enough for his father, he wasn't going to think about ("He will not go behind his father's saying"). On the right or on the left, that's the fundamentalist mentality in any & no religion & politics. Frost's fellow-farmer may little more than amuse us, but change his slogan's wording a little to fit the mouth of Khomeini & we are horrified: an unexamined generalization (eg, "The Koran [or the Bible!] is perfect") + coercive power = evil....Because human beings need structured verbal houses (conceptual frameworks) to live in, slogans (which are to our invisible house what a flag is to a nation) are inevitable. But just as it's a psychological truism that the house we enter to live in soon lives in us (in all its in/adequacies), so we are forever in danger of becoming slogan addicts, hooked on our own smooth sayings. We recognize easily the addicts of slogans not ours (eg, "Niggers are inferior"), & we call those slogans prejudices, a prejudice being a rejected-by-us opinion. A slogan is an empowered opinion; & you & I, sharing as we do a central cluster of values, don't like what some folks (eg, KKK) do under the power of their opinions....Slogans tend to move energy from mind to muscle. "Abortion is murder" both shuts off thinking (as murder is unthinkable) & incites to passive & active physical force to impede the legitimate work of physicians (pejoratively called "abortionists")....Built into everybody's spiritual-intellectual formation are incentives (positive motivators) & decentives (taboos). Everybody needs others, esp. in a pluralistic society & emerging global culture, to see, sort, refine-replace these interior hot buttons. By nature & training I'm good at pushing folks' hot buttons & (to change the figure) helping them work on the springs & roots of their behavior, hopes, & fears. From the standpoint of social rewards, it is, as the biblical prophets discovered, one of the less profitable human occupations. And it's dangerous: people irritated by this manipulation may turn their irritation against its source rather than toward self-improvement. May it not be so with you!....Slogans can be life-damaging because of content, motive, or imbalance (excess attention). In those cases I'm a prosecutor-antagonist. During our retreat I made a list of your slogan (according to my lights) errors, & in our last session I quickly sketched them, together with, in each case, a few words of mine intended to be liberating or at least thought-provoking. (Asked afterwards if I believe "all that," I said "Of course. I set you up, but I wouldn't put you on. But caution: my responses to your [as I see them] prejudices are only irritants, not expositions.")....We are, as Aristotle said, the language animal; our private & public lives are word-shaped, & at least in this sense words are alive. (Even letters, which Jewish mysticism says fly off up to heaven when an old, no-longer-useful Torah scroll is burned.)....**Two paradoxes:** (1) Freedom with & from words is one freedom: the wordmaster is free from taking words too seriously, from word-enslavement (eg, by slogans); (2) The wider & deeper the diameter of one's word-knowledge, the greater the consciousness of one's reality-ignorance....Hear/read me through the four Ps: prayer, play, poetry, prose. In school, all of us were taught to overvalue the fourth & to read the others in its light. Too bad. I do not honor that distortion, for which we all need remedial education. As for the first three Ps, I have an early-American-Yankee consciousness & praxis, like that of the first great American poet, Edward Taylor. And you heard my paraphrase of Aquinas: The road that opens before our feet is a challenge to our heart long before it tests the strength of our legs. Our destiny is to run to the edge of the world & beyond, off into the darkness: sure in spite of all our blindness, secure in spite of all our helplessness, joyfully in love in spite of all the pressures on our heart. In that darkness beyond the world, we can begin to know the world & ourselves. We can begin to understand that we were not made to pace out our lives behind prison walls but to walk into the arms of God.

10. Before I rough out (very rough!) prejudices I over/under-heard from you, let me say once more, from a different angle, who I think was with you. (I recall an early section, "What Readers Should Know About the Author," of HOW TO THINK ABOUT GOD, a great book by an old teacher of mine, Mortimer Adler.) My opinions (I call them "convictions") are in continuous process of reformation **independently** (there being no institution that can fire me & no cohort [social sector] whose good graces I court), **centrally** (from "where I'm coming from" in all senses), & **dynamically** (how I think these days, at this last life-stage, when I have more freedom to think [being less "active"] & more to think with & about than ever before--when, in short, I have at least the making-s of Eriksonian generativity & of the Jungian-archetypal

Old Wise One, converging the feminine & masculine powers of cerebration--a merger modern men & women find intolerable, which is a root of ageism in our culture). Now, it's predictable that a person with this mental profile will come to some conclusions some will think, variously, irrelevant/irreverent/idiosyncratic/dangerous/weird. Of course all old folks are weird to the nonold, & the more they think the weirder they seem. They are trying to listen to the decibel-rising conversation between their brain-hemispheres. They are trying to run all the tapes at once &--at the same time!--sort things out for themselves. They are trying to tell a less-&-less-interested world how to tell sense from nonsense & how to mount counterattacks on the latter (eg, my attacks on relativisms, reductionisms, subjectivisms. ideologies). While they listen better than ever before (though their hearing may be going bad), they seem to be poor listeners because they think they've heard it all before (which is largely true) & because they believe that almost all human utterance is only self-promotive or self-defensive, both boring (which is certainly true), & because they're hard at work on what they've already heard (some of which is more important than anything they're going to hear before the funeral)....Everybody needs a crash course in inter-generational listening.

Now for your prejudices (not all in any one of you!) & my suggestive responses (the latter modesty put in smaller type):

1. Reality fully supports my worldview.

That's either ignorance or arrogance. Every worldview or ideology has clarity & coherence but only claims, does not & cannot have, comprehensivity, there being no picture (German, "Weltbild") that neither distorts anything nor leaves anything out. We're all in the same boat, & the boat is only floating on reality. When I speak for God, as I must, may I ever bear in mind that I am speaking not from sky or sea but only from this here boat & my small space in it. Science now knows enough to know that what's conceivably knowable exceeds the range of our brain's limited number of neurons: we know that by reason we can't hope to come to know the fulness of the theoretically knowable. Good science now joins good religion in teaching humility & good humor. So don't take my opinions (or yours!) more seriously (or less!) than you should....Honor worldviews only as necessary nets for fishing up some reality you can eat; honor generalizations as the necessary warp & woof of worldnets.

2. Men and women are equal.

Wrong from both sides. More than 1/3rd c. ago Ashley Montagu proved THE NATURAL SUPERIORITY OF WOMEN (eg, in human relations, in holistic thinking, in intuition)--which was a necessary corrective to the known fact, runaway in sexism, that men are superior (in linear-analytic thinking, in aggression-adventure, in musculature). The human reality has always been the mutual superiority of the sexes. The contemporary need is to work out the most creative partnership between superiors while enhancing rather than blurring the differences, which are coming to be known as fast as are the similarities...."Equal rights" are wrong: what's needed are just rights, rights appropriate to biology-genes-hormones, to be honored as the 11th commandment (Thou shall honor thy & thy neighbor's biology-genes-hormones. Eg, a high-androgens woman should not be impeded from venturing & leading simply because of her sex; nor should a high-estrogens man be looked down on when he prefers nurturance.)

3. Woman power would be better than man power is.

The underdog's self-congratulatory illusionary myth against the top dog (to use Fritz Perls' lingo). Whole books have been written to "prove" a past matriarchal goddess-worshipping golden age; but the historical evidence is that women do better, are less oppressed, in god-worshipping cultures....Further, the statement is inherently unjust to men: women are just as vicious (& of course virtuous), but the underdog's viciousness is not as apparent....Some folks say we have patriarchal societies because "we tried matriarchy & it didn't work": matriarchal societies are unviable, having insufficient teeth & claws. I say patriarchal societies were viable but are so no longer, being overactive in teeth & claws (against both fellow-humanity & the biosphere)....Some folks (including me) say it's shameful we've not yet had a woman President, but other folks say "Who needs an American Meg Thatcher?"

4. Immanence is better than transcendence.

This prejudice runs through womanism & much of feminism & has taken theological form in "creation [v. redemption] spirituality," condemned by the Vatican for (among other things) replacing theism with panentheism (we're all in God, whose in all, including all of us--so it's difficult to keep Father God from being swallowed up into Mother Earth/Nature). Uterine interiority-subjectivity is better than phallic exteriority-objectivity. The mystical is superior both to the rational & to the historical. The East is spiritually superior to the West. The grass is greener on the other side of the fence....This mentality, instead of being prophetic, is only bathetic. What is called for is not a sophomoric either/or but balance, & there's more of that in classical Christian thinking (including mine) than immanentists are willing to grant....As for the neo-myth that Mother Earth is gentler than Father Sky (I-E Dyaus Pitr), Darwin would laugh. He could retain faith in God only by converting from theism to deism: his observations confirmed Hobbes' "nature red in tooth & claw," & vicious Mother Earth was Darwin's central theodic puzzle. So far I've seen no feminist theologian suggest what seem possible to me, viz, that "Mother Earth" & "Mother Nature" are sexist expressions, the boys giving the girls a bum rap. But in the American media, "Mother Nature" has entirely

crowded God out. Some philosophers of history see civilizations becoming more feminine as their energies lessen & they approach death. I think that if our species is to survive, which will require our arriving at a homeostatic synergism with our bio-environment, hypermasculinity must yield to the feminine enough for balance. If the teetertotter tips too far & the curse of hyperfemininity falls upon us, as some fear, we shall face the other threats, glooms, dooms. May the good Lord deliver us from Superwoman (& Superman)! (I am doubly paranoid: a gynophobe as well as an androphobe. But God is greater than my trembling heart.)

5. Capital punishment is ineffective.

It's effectiveness is 100%. Execution would have absolutely deterred Willie Horton from further murdering. The weakest argument against cap.pun. is that some innocent die: the truth is that where there's no cap.pun., many innocent die, the victims of released murderers. Criminological efficiency is another argument for cap.pun.: it lessens both the need for prison space & the need for police. And it reduces the recidivists "back on the street" & thus the public's terror of the criminal. The contra argument that cap.pun. shows disrespect for human life is fatuous: "the revolving door" (that Bush used so powerfully against Dukakis) shows more disrespect for human life, the life of the innocent public the government lets the Willie Hortons loose on. And to say that cap.pun. brutalizes: does not its absence the more brutalize society, some inner cities becoming no longer fit to live in? Two responses to the claim that it costs less to imprison for life than to execute: (1) The current expensive legal indecisiveness on death row need not continue; & (2) Few are kept in prison for life, & to the cost of keeping them alive in prison must be added recidivistic costs, public costs incurred by the criminal activities of repeaters. Finally, the notion that cap.pun. is unChristian is unhistorical: until modern sentimental bleeding-heart liberalism, we Christians, with almost no exceptions, assumed cap.pun. as necessary to justice & the public tranquility....So how did the cap.pun. issue become as much a test of the true liberal as the virgin birth is a test of the true fundamentalist?

6. The fetus is sacred.

God is holy, honor & freedom are sacred, nature (including humanity) is neither (being, in biblical religion, desacralized). Resacralizations are political: Hitler's "blood & soil," the divine right of kings, the fetus as inviolate (which is what "sacred" means). A few now are pressing "consistent respect for human life": no abortion, no war, no capital punishment, no self-defense, no defending your family (poor Kitty Dukakis, with Mike just standing there while she gets raped & murdered!). Reductum ad absurdum, indeed....Radical special pleading for the fetus is against mother-family-society-environment. In short, it's idoatrous ("fetolatry") & as such, myopic & fanatic. According to an Arab saying, there are three kinds of people: movers, the movable, & the immovable (those who would rather die than change--including me on the subject of faithfulness to my wife, & Khomeini on the subject of the perfection of his holybook, & almost all the "pro-life"ers I've talked with). The immovable say (to combine two wellknown phrases), "In the name of all that's sacred," "here I stand!"....Where do I come from to this issue? From the biosphere, the means of divine creation & providence. Since the rising tide of human flesh is the only threat to the biosphere's health & wealth, every human death (including every abortion) is a victory for the biosphere against its only enemy. Who am I to argue with the biosphere, since I can't conceive of God standing against the biosphere in the interest of humanity? For taking this position I've been called inhuman. I don't admit it, I proclaim it. "In-human," against humanity, by preferential option for the biosphere.

7. God is prejudiced toward the poor.

Liberationists put this more softly as God's "preferential option for the poor" (& thus my trope of it "for the biosphere"). In the Bible, this divine bias is poetic-prophetic-hyperbolic (else it would be blasphemous, & contradict the many justice sayings about God's evenhandedness, adjusting for the much/little a person is "given"). But in liberation theology this notion has frozen into a dogma that is logically nonsensical though it's rhetorically appealing. Taken literally, the dogma does not enhance God's reputation ("the sanctification of the Name," to use the Jewish life-goal Jesus expresses at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer): the world looks at the losers, asks who their ineffectual advocate & champion is, & is told "God"! But ah yes, the Crucifixion's challenge to the deuteronomistic claim that riches & power are evidences of divine blessing, of God's having a preferential option for the advantaged....The Magnificat's reversal of fortune (the rich & poor to exchange places when Kingdom comes) must not be perverted into a slogan for putting God & the poor on one side & the rich, to be targets of hostility, on the other. This abuse increases self-righteousness in the poor & decreases the rich's small reservoir of good will toward, & willingness to dialog with, the poor.

8. God is not masculine.

What God? True of Pascal's "the God of the philosophers" & Tillich's "God beyond God." But the biblical God is not an abstraction or an androgyne. He (sic) is personal-masculine not only in terms of address (God, Lord, King, Father, Son) but also in behavior (predominantly androcentric, including sending his Son). For many years I desexed the hymns to be sung at the NY.Theol.Seminary commencements, then came to see that Christianity cannot be androgynized simply by monkeying with words toward "inclusive language."....The paradox is that while our religion is kinder to women than is any other because it's the most feminine of the world's religions, Christianity is also the most masculine (eg, the only world religion in which God appears only as a man: Sun Moon thinks to improve on the masculine incarnation by preaching that Messiah must appear as a couple [presumably, though not openly, a reference to Mrs. Moon])....I affirm a parallel: as women & men are superior to each other, our Christian faith is, as compared with other religions, superiorly both feminine & masculine; why should I not rejoice in all four facts? But because the churches have under-celebrated femininity (& Marian devotion is insufficiently corrective), I must remark: (1) Christians have always taught that Jesus reveals the human side of God; now we need to stress that against the macho & sexism of his world & ours, Jesus reveals the feminine side of God (eg, Mark 10), who is (in contrast to most of the competing gods during the biblical period), consortless (needing no wife [a] for companionship, there being communion within the Trinity--though legend elaborates Hokmah-Sophia-Wisdom as his companion-consortant, or [b] for siring, for he's able to bring forth his Son from himself, as it were parthenogenetically); (2) As both masculine & feminine are comprehended in the Creator (Gn.1) & transcended in

the Redeemer (Gal.3), the dominance of one sex over the other, in individual & sociopolitical relationships, violates the nature both of God & of human community; (3) As communion transcends without negating sexuality, the biblical God who "thous" us into communion transcends without negating his masculinity; (4) Sex-change theological surgery on the biblical God cuts away his personality along with his masculinity, requiring such a radical rewrite of the biblical story as to constitute a new religion; (4) Meditate on the profound femininity of the Lord's Prayer, including our Lord's shift from the political ("King") to the domestic ("Father") metaphor; (5) Consider an a fortiori in Jesus: if he teaches that the sexual divide is ultimately irrelevant for us (Mark 12²⁵ & parallels), how little weight must he have put on the question of God's sex! Literalists, beware how you read Jesus' masculine titles for God (God, Lord, Father, King); but also inclusivists, beware: if you scruple against God's masculine titles & "he/his/him," you will find in the Christian Book, Christian liturgy, the Christian classics overwhelming & unrelenting "scandals" (Greek for occasions of stumbling) which you will rage ineffectually against, sickening yourself & your children if you stay in the church & depriving yourself & your children if you leave. Further, the result of switching even occasionally from "he" to "she" is to wind up with "it," the merely ludicrous become betrayal.

9. Jesus teaches nonviolence.

Gandhi did (as a cosmic principle), Jesus didn't (for he expected violence to be a component in the fullcoming of the Kingdom-Reign-Realm of God). Jefferson in his bowdlerized NT modernized Jesus into an ethical teacher, expurgating the nonrational (an act parallel to what was soon to happen in the French Revolution, the placing of the Goddess of Reason on Notre Dame's main altar). But Jesus drew still-relevant antiviolent inferences from his missional consciousness (his self-understanding as to God's will for & through him)...."Violence" is any coercion "they" use & "we" don't: Jesus & Robt. Frost ask us to look "behind" the word. We must speak the gospel's theocentric antiviolence against a society in which violence is (1) decreasingly moderated by family & religion & (2) increasingly encouraged by the entertainment industry's glorifying of brute force in the interest of commercial profits & by the government's refusal to "provide for the public tranquility" against crime (& thus the public's rearming, to the joy of the NRA).

10. Monogamy is too confining.

No painless sex trips, but monogamy* is the least painful & the most honoring of women. *Absolute. No adultery.

11. Colonialism is evil.

This is the antonym of "the sovereignty of nations," a dogma from a Princeton Calvinist historian's moralization of history & politics. Political reality cannot be confined in Wilsonian or any other ideology. Are the Lebanese better off now that they're "free"? And the Guyanese now that they don't have Queen Elizabeth to kick around any more?....And beware of old colonialism (eg, we Europeans' overwhelming of the Amerinds) when it hypocritically preaches against more recent & new colonialism & against other folks' old colonialism. Political situation-ethics judges each colonialism as net good or net evil--granting that every colonialism is, at least at first, hard on the natives.

12. In war, everybody loses.

The victors control land & language: that's not winning? Site clearance (of trees & other people) first, then building; then military & police to protect you from "invaders" (meaning folks who want to site-clean you off the land so they can build). Short of the Kingdom of God, that's history for you. The PLO charter promises to site-clear "Palestine" of Jewish land-claims, but Arab wars & terrorism have failed: insufficient coercive force. Tough. And it's tough to convince the Israelis that the PLO doesn't really mean what it's been saying for forty years....Sentimental pacifism, obscuring reality, does more harm than good....Yes, in some wars, everybody loses. And in some wars, the loser wins in another way; eg, post-WWII Japan. And in Pyrrhic victories, the winner's cost is excessive. And, Kingdom come, wars will end, as will marriage & death; &, before then, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt.5). Meanwhile, the bromide that "War solves nothing" has no more truth than its diametrical, viz, "Only war solves anything."....Possibly in biological & nuclear warfare everybody would lose, but the use of those weapons is improbable....Do I like the war system? Yes where's its benefited me, no where it hasn't; but I prefer the Kingdom of God, for which I pray every day in the Lord's Prayer.

13. Everybody deserves justice.

We're all sinners, deserving nothing but judgment; anything we get is by God's grace. That ought to keep us humble & grateful....It says here, "with liberty & justice for all," which is a generative oxymoron of great wisdom....Justice preaches rights, custom & law defend both rights & privilege. I thank God for my privileges (partly self-achieved, mainly inherited from family & nation) &, within the limits of privileges I'm unwilling to renounce (eg, my U.S. citizenship), I struggle for justice for all. And I do not preach to others what I'm unwilling to practice; eg, I don't tell white S.Africans they should practice one-person-one-vote democracy. (Weighted voting would increase black power without severely reducing white privilege, which is an expression of justice to the S.African white ancestors. Weighted voting might fail; apartheid has failed, thank God.)

14. "This land belongs to you & me" (Pete Seeger et al).

Wrong titled deed. The truth: "The earth is the Lord's...." The Arabs don't own the oil they're sitting on, the Brazilians don't own the rainforests they're destroying, & we don't own America. Radical theopolitics calling for a new system of coercion (beyond national military & local police), urgently needed to protect the biosphere against its only enemy, humanity, us.

15. We shouldn't push our religion on others. You wanna leave the world to other pushers?

16. Human beings are born good. A romantic illusion, as disappointing & destructive as its opposite, viz, that we're born evil. Contrast the wisdom of the Bible's origin stories: creation is "very good," the fall & its consequences (including genotypical) are evil.

17. Religion & government should be kept separate. No, please! Relig. & pol. organizations.