

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

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Yesterday morning a hospital chaplain asked me to help him develop a list of ways to help a patient speak-reveal his/her "worldview," the chaplain believing (as I do) that knowing this could help the medical staff better understand, and work with, the patient. Bill Wilcox & I worked at it briefly on our way to Harvard U., where with our wives we were in the Coop & the museums before exposing ourselves to the glories of Mozart, Mahler, & Brahms (Seiji Ozawa conducting the Boston Symphony). The question percolated all day in my preconscious: the world-picture of the Persian miniaturist who did "Drunkenness on Earth & in Heaven"? Of the Greek waiter? Of the welfare mother begging by bike? Of the nonWestern clerk in the chemistry section of the Coop? Of Mozart-Mahler-Brahms? Ozawa? Mine?

1. Mine is **providential**, in two senses: it's providential I have the world-view I have (& I thank God for his gracious gift of it through our Lord Jesus Christ), & providence is my view of the world (philosophically) that I'm trying to live (religiously, in both senses)....In these parts, some folks are fixin' to celebrate (?) the tercentenary of the (1692) Salem witch trials, & I'm trying for a bit of input toward fairness to the government. I've seen the legal codex used for the trials: you could get yourself executed for any one of a score of crimes, blasphemy & witchcraft being two. The Vietnam war was a Bad Idea: the execution of twenty witches (in the sense, at least, of being so sentenced) was only mainly a bad idea. Cotton Mather, famous as theologian-scientist-moralist-preacher (400 publications), was wrong in thinking the executions were a Good Idea, but not entirely wrong: community cohesion, necessary to community survival vis-a-vis several threats, was being victimized by voodoo, which had been inadvertently imported from Jamaica (in the person of a parson's black servant) & was becoming epidemic as a psychospiritual disease against which the only antibody the Puritans had was law. The Indian population had been reduced not by red/white war but by white physical diseases against which the Indians had insufficient antibodies. Those diseases were usually, except in plague times, containable on the other side of the Atlantic. So was voodoo, a religion on the other side of the Atlantic (in black Africa) & in the Caribbean (where it continues as the ground-religion of Haiti). What imperfectly goes under the caption "racism" in our country is the continuing white Europe / black Africa culture-conflict (most visible, & I think most powerful, in music)....The secular press remembers CM as a radical, a witch-killer. He was a moderate, in between the order-loving Anglican establishment & various licence-lovers (hedonists, charismatics [including voodooists], anarchists). Mob psychology? Well, how control it? Witch-hunt? How do you separate the pushers (the witches, or demon-possessed) from the pushed (those emotionally agitated by the pushers, but themselves uninfested)? (In the just-concluded McMartin School case in Calif., the five-year battle--the most expensive in American jurisprudential criminal history--millions of words & dollars went into trying to separate the abused children (if any!) from the children only caught up in the insanity which now has hundreds of parents in the area demonstrating with signs saying "1,400 of our children have been abused!" And it all started with one psychotic mother laying unsubstantiated claims that the Buckeys had abused her child! Witch-hunt '90, not three cs. ago.).....The tercentenary is in danger of uncritical acceptance of the Arthur Miller ("The Crucible") analysis: the trial was only superstition because there aren't any witches because there can't be any witches because there are no demons to possess the soul (& even if there were, is there a soul?). In your world-picture, what's the reality-&-role of evil? how do you explain Hitler & the 99% vote he got in 1933? Did the 20 Salem executions stop the spread of voodoo, or would some lesser sentence have done so, or would it soon have died out with no trials? Nobody can know, & this multiple ignorance ought to support some humility in the tercentenary. Who, now in our society, are the witches (if any) we should be hunting down? Is the American democracy still morally-ethically viable, given the current levels of internal/external controls & qualities of motivation? The Perry Miller school of thinking about early American Puritanism will have nothing to do with the supernatural, God or angels or devil or demons: are we recovered enough from that to have an honest Salem-trials tercentenary?...."Providence Asserted & Adored" is the title of a just-recovered Cotton

Mather funeral sermon full of passion, compassion, horror (at the drowning, in sight of the rest of the family, of father, mother, & one child), anguish, agony--contrary to the caricature of the Puritans as hard, unemotional, unsympathetic, unfeeling, a distortion some of their descendants (such as Nath. Hawthorne in his *THE SCARLET LETTER*) perpetrated (though Hawthorne's tempted parson was anything but unfeeling!). Why the distortion? Some Puritans failed to keep feeling/thinking, faith/reason in balance (not the great ones, eg CM & Jon. Edwards). But the main reason was that when the Puritan faith grew cold in cold New England, the Puritan way of seeing the world seemed cruel: God seemed cold, cruel. Imagine reading that sermon in cold blood: "Providence Asserted & Adored"! CM says the drowning tragedy was within God's will & therefore, above proper grief & no denial of the tragic dimension, an occasion not only to assert Providence (with cap, as a name of God) but also to adore, praise, glorify God. Those who are not striving daily to walk in the Presence cannot but consider this whole point of view, world-view, as inauthentic to the point of grotesqueness. Some folk even make big bucks denying "It was God's will" (eg, *WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE*), & most pastoral counselors are allergic to the sentence at both ends (ie they wouldn't use it in the face of tragedy, nor would they be inclined to think the stricken honest in its use). Me, I treat the sentence with awe at both ends; for triumph & tragedy are both mysteries within the dis/continuities of the universe from-in-toward the One God: I am a providentialist in the Puritan tradition. (The NT is dominantly providentialist, but makes some use of the moralist [or Stoic] world-view, & even less of the empiricist. The three I laid out in #1910.)

2. CM's sermon was Nov.7, 1718, 26 years after the execution of the Salem witches & 179 years before Alex. Balmain Bruce's Gifford Lectures, *THE PROVIDENTIAL ORDER OF THE WORLD* (Scrib/97, the year of the lectures & of my copy thereof). Lord Gifford intended that the lectures explore religion within the limits of reason, ie natural rather than revealed theology. In those days, everybody was striving for a scientific this or that (Marx, scientific history; Freud, scientific psychology; Durkheim, scientific sociology). What could Bruce make of the great NT-Puritan doctrine of providence within scientific theology? A bold, classic effort (p.6): "God cares for man individually and collectively; His nature is such, and He sustains such a relation to man, as makes that care natural and credible; His care covers all human interests, but especially the higher, ethical interests--righteousness, goodness--in the individual and in society; He is a moral Governor, and a benignant Father, a Power making for righteousness, and a Power overcoming evil with good; He ruleth over all things with a view to a kingdom of the good." Sound too easy? His chapters against his opponents are tough-minded. And he deals superbly with the attendant principles of election ("not for favour but for function"), solidarity (we are not "isolated units" but "closely knit together by parentage, by heredity, by a social organism, by ties of race and nationality"), & sacrifice ("suffering for truth, righteousness, humanity") (pp.19f).

3. "How go about finding a patient's world-view" as a bridge to the medical staff ("the context in which the patient lives his/her life & makes decisions")? [Quoted material here is Wilcox.] Not for no good reason do the Germans distinguish world-view, world-picture, philosophy of life; my favorite is way of seeing, & living in, the world (a philosophy being only a way of seeing the world, without personal commitment). So I like to ask: How do you see the world? what is your picture of it? "Some have a picture so poor & gray that their life-project is to survive amid multiple threats." They are cognitively, whether or not psychologically (whatever that means), paranoid. "Others have a rich, exciting, open view that makes every day a series of creative opportunities." Ask: Are there any sayings that often come to you comfortingly? If so, what are they? "In your whole life, what is the best experience you have ever had?" Please add "so far" (for which the slogan comes to mind "Be patient! God is not finished with me yet."). Again, What are your feelings about the world? Whom do you like most, & why? Whom do you like least, & why? "The conversation should get at motivation, where the person feels dependant & where autonomous (in control)." Yes! Ask, In your whole life, who's the person you've known you've most admired? why?