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LESSONS FROM THE OLD MILLENIUM

Inasmuch as many culture-mavens have made bold to do this, I can't resist my own whack at it. No particular order, unless when I've finished this sheet it appears that the items are in decreasing order of spleen.

1 Too bad hell disappeared. Subjectively, i.e.; certainly not objectively: "The 20th has been a rough century for the democratic states, under siege from without by totalitarian dictatorships, bedeviled from within by poverty, racism, gross inequality and spiritual vacancy." These words (15 AARP BULL. Dec/99) of Arthur Schlesinger Jr., for more than half the century an American culture-&-politics pundit, don't quite make it to Jimmy Carter's "spritual malaise" analysis unless one considers absence a sickness. Hell disappeared, became "vacant." The healthful belief that death does not terminate +/- (heaven/hell) consequences--i.e., the conviction that our behavior has postmortem as well as premortem seriousness--died (along with the "devil" & "sin").

What helped keep this salubrious doctrine of a moral afterlife going was preaching & the reading of classics--the Bible, Dante, the medieval Mystery plays, Piers Plowman, Bunyan, Milton, Spencer (material long since dropped from required reading in our public schools).....Results?

For secularists, heaven died along with hell. This wasn't as bad as...

for sentimentalists, heaven survived as nonmoral narcissistic fantasy. Jim Jones told 912 followers that they could go to heaven by suicide (though in Dante, all suicides go to hell). The same for the "Heaven's Gate" folks with their brand-new Nikes: death would beam them up to a better world in the tail of the Comet. The same for the Littleton mass murderers/suicides: the video they made that morning said they looked forward to a better life in the next world after the massacre. (Do you agree that those boys should have been taught they'd go to hell--at least as a matter of public health, even if the teacher didn't believe it?)

2 Too bad liberal religion went soft on its surround, the secular-humanist culture. The wisdom of Flannery O'Connor was forgotten: "You have to push as hard as the age pushes against you." The early Christians saw their residence at the other end of the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come...." As Diognetus put it, Christians are everywhere aliens. Rebellious youth of the 1960s were alienates against a conformist culture & accomodated religion, but they longed for Cockaigne (some with the help of cocaine) liberation rather than the freedom of the gospel. But now American liberal Protestant includes a Flanner-O'Connor-like liberation by alienation (of which we'll be hearing in Craigville Theological Colloquy XVII 7.12-16.99).

Addendum to the O'Connor metaphor: The early Christians won by pushing a little harder than the age was pushing against them. They outargued as well as outthought & outloved their opponents. We should too, even at the cost of not always being "nice."

3 Too bad we let multiculturalism swamp the educational privileging of America's foundational heritage. Radical egalitarianism abhors the category "privilege" in spite of the universal human fact that human groups (families, tribes, nations, etc.) privilege their origins (i.e., place them front & center among group-origins) as a necessity for maintaining their group-ness, cohesion, solidarity. America's children, in being taught to honor their one common foundational heritage, need not & should not be taught to look down on other heritages: the neat phrase "primus inter pares" (first among equals) guards against both globalistic multiculturalism & chauvinism..... To be clear, let me state our one common foundational heritage negatively: it did not include women, children, Catholics, Jews (or devotees of any other non-Christian religion), blacks, browns, reds, or yellows. It's a decisional product of a pile of old dead white males beginning with 1215 (Magna Carta) and running through 1620 (Mayflower Compact) to 1776-89 (the specific U.S. founding documents: Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers, Constitution [with Bill of Rights]). All of them property owners (especially 1215!) having English as their mother-tongue (so all their founding documents were English only). It's OK to cluckcluck about the white-males-

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only in the historical decision-making process (formal deliberations & the production of the founding documents); it's as stupid to get stuck on that fact as it would be to emphasize it. (One exception to "no Catholics": there weren't any Protestants in 1215.)

4 Too bad we're abetting radical feminism's denigration-debunking of the common American heritage (biblical & political) as "patriarchal." (NOTE: "Common" here does not mean held in common (in the past) but now, in the structures & functions of Americans' life together, exclusively common to all ["exclusively": no other sacred literature than the Bible, no other political tradition than the AngloSaxon, are built into all Americans-as-Americans, including those who despise Bible &/or democracy]).. ..Some liberal Christians, intimidated/convinced by the radical-feminist cultural wave, so decry "patriarchy" that they try even to wash it out of God: God pronominally genderless (i.e., no use of the Bible's [all-masculine] pronouns for God), Jesus neutered by death (i.e., genderless in resurrection), thus sapping Christianity's traditional ability to keep goddess-worship suppressed. (The blurb for her REBIRTH OF THE GODDESS: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality [Routledge/98], credits Carol P. Christ with the creation of "a new model of embodied thinking," the "first systematic theology of the Goddess.") Can faithful Christian thinkers now denounce the goddess without being smeared as "sexist"?

5 Too bad the sleazy media culture glorifies celebrities more than heroes. We Christians should counter, among ourselves & in witness, by focusing on those who in God's eyes are worthy of honor & emulation. Loree & I have just finished reading to each other the story of a great unsung hero (I want to say "heroine," but I've been informed it's a sexist word & only the masculine [neo-generic] form should be used!), May Cravath Wharton, MD, DOCTOR WOMAN OF THE CUMBERLANDS (Uplands [Pleasant Hill, TN]/53/72): heard of her?*

6 Too bad that the Enlightenment-Romantic myth that children are good prevails in our government schools for children, so kids (1) are taught "self-esteem" & (2) are free from the fear of official punitive bodily pain. The zero-tolerance policy against harassment does not exclude the cruelties, brutalities, verbal tortures, & ostracisms evil children oppress their peers with. The freaks/geeks/nerds/dweebs are now fighting back effectively (in the sense the public is taking notice): Columbine & the outsider threats sufficient to terrorize schools into temporary closings & exclusions (now, an oppressed-excluded is suing the Sandwich MA school system for $26M). The diagnoses of school pathologies will not go deep enough as long as the E.-R. myth continues to blind its holders to the myth-threatening realities.

7 Too bad that in the service of secular humanism, psychology has been perverted into psychobabble & sociology into political correctness. Objectors (e.g., Edward Banfield & Thos.Sowell) get treated by the secular media the way, in our public schools, the jocks (& their ilk) treat the uncool: why wouldn't media prejudices be extentions of our people's public-school experience? The sick system is safe as long as the symptom analyses remain superficial....Two of D.Scott's children were victims at Columbine High. Here's some of what he said to the U.S.House Judiciary Subcommittee (2.SCPN/Sum/99): "Your laws ignore our deepest needs, / Your words are empty air. / You've stripped away our heritage, / You've outlawed simple prayer. / Now gunshots fill our classrooms. / And precious children die. / You seek for answers everywhere. / And ask the question, 'WHY'? / You regulate restrictive laws / Through legislative creed. / And yet you fail to understand, / That God is what we need!"

8 Too bad we are so kind to God-evasions. Today a resident of a "spiritual" commune said to me "They preach 'symbolism,' & I'd like to scream 'Symbolism *of what?*'" "Spirituality" is a hyperindividualistic-narcissistic substitute for (communal) religion. And social-change promotions (as the UCC national office's push for homosexually "Open & Affirming" congregations) is a substitute for the personal transformation which in the NT is the primary motivator to caring.

9 Too bad we've moved from modernism's "Follow your head" to postmodernism's "Follow your heart," both in bypass of Jesus' "Follow me."

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* She was both saint & doctor--reminding me of Simone Weil's saying "The world needs saints who have genius just as a plague-stricken town needs doctors."