

WE MUST BE EGALITARIAN, FOR GOD THE CREATOR IS NOT--

EVEN THOUGH GOD THE REDEEMER IS - Elliott #2008

Yes, this thinksheet title is tongue-in-cheek. But tongue-in-cheek is one dimension of human art and human truth, and on every private and public issue should have its day in court and in academe and on the street....What I'm playing with here is the embarrassing discrepancy between God the Creator's behavior vis-a-vis egalitarian "justice" and libertarianism's versioning of God as biased toward the poor, a versioning derived from biblical notes about God the Redeemer.

1. First, I'm impressed with the compassion, pathos, and fragility of this argumentation. Obviously, a god worth his salt ("his" being my latest androgynous pronominal adjective) will be IN CHARGE, dominating cosmos ("nature") and history (the human scene): if you can't control the constants, what can you make of the variables? I believe this God IS, and that our best blick here is the Bible.

2. A few days ago (specifically, 19 Oct 85), a student was delighted to discover that my library included at least the past 33 years of JBL: she wanted Morton Smith's "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East" (Sept/52), in which you can easily view this God-claiming for nature and history. Interesting that OT profs are still asking students to read this watershed article. I remember MS's presentation of his thesis at the 1951 SBL annual meeting, esp. the ensuing consternation: the uniqueness of Ancient Israel's religion was at stake. I was there, and responded oppositely: how wonderful the continuities synchronically as well as diachronically in history, as (Darwin) in nature! The notion did not weaken my faith in the biblical God, but rather strengthened it. And so I was able to persuade this student.

3. MS's paper was an immediate reflection on a watershed book that set my soul singing when it came out in 1950 (ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS RELATING TO THE OT, ed. J.B. Prichard, Princeton UP). We call it "ANET," and can't get along without it if we're honest & competent biblical scholars. JBP's interest was descriptive: he wanted to display the data. MS's interest was humanistic: he wanted to dissuade particularists (ie, traditional Jews-and-Christians). I saw the development as an echo-enrichment of the old unity/diversity discussion about the Bible itself. And I still do.

4. At one stage of my consciencization, I devoured Camus, the romantic French existential-humanist who left us at 47, missing a curve in a Paris park. Of his oeuvre, my most-used quote is this: "We must be kind, for God is not." A sardonic reflection (1) on the human condition and (2) on the discrepancy bet. the biblical claim of divine caring for humanity and the present and historical agonies of humanity. Obviously, this thinksheet's title is a trope on this quote. As a Christian, a clergyman, and a theologian, I struggle to defend the divine benevolence against its uncultured and cultured despisers: it's not easy. Any way of seeing-and-living-in-the-world (ie, any "religion") will on some particulars have an easy time of it, and on others a hard time. Theism is ontologically easy and morally tough. Ontologically, theism is richer than monism (such as Carl Sagan's COSMOS) and dualism (dual eternities, ontological and/or moral); but ethically it's less simple than either. Theism's submyths may accommodate modern sensibilities; ie, one may say that God, Creator/Redeemer, is egalitarian, but "dark powers" have messed with our genes.

5. Personally, I reject both clauses of this thinksheet's title. I'm for fairness, not to be equated with egalitarianism: God the Creator is fair, just, loving, but not evenhanded--and is also God the Redeemer. One God, most palpable in Jesus.