

OUR GOD'S REPUTATION DEPENDS ON OURS

In nightly praying the Lord's Prayer, I frequently expand the first line ("Hallowed be Thy Name") some such wise: "Help me to be, tomorrow, good news for Your reputation." Our God's reputation depends on ours.

1 When last night, in his four-minute sort-of apology Clinton said that the whole seven-month lying-about-Lewinsky thing should be "put behind us," he added that henceforth the matter is within his family & with "our God." I winced. Why drag "our God" into this tawdry, mendacious affair? Why wasn't "our God" strong enough to prevent it? What good does it do for Clinton to carry his Bible to church when he so flagrantly broke 1/5th of the commandments (vis-a-vis adultery & false witness)? And another: In dishonoring himself, he dishonored his parents. And when he said "I was wrong," can we believe him, or was he only spinning his anger into "virtual" penitence? Having hatched seven-months betrayals in a nest of treachery, can anybody ever again believe anything he says (esp. when he looks & sounds utterly sincere)? Did he victimize truth even more than family, friends, & fellow-workers? Has he permanently crippled himself & his place in history?

Mother Teresa walked the Bible & improved its (& its deity's) reputation on the earth. Bill Clinton carried the Bible & diminished its (& its deity's) reputation on the earth. Let's pray that he'll humbly accept the grace to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance" (Mt.3.8; Ac.26.20).

2 This morning, only a few hours after Clinton's speech, I came upon the following in my daily devotional Bible-readings:

In *Hebrew*, Ex.20.12 (& Deut.5.16): *chabad*^h: "*Honor* [bring glory to, improve the reputation of] your father and your mother." These meanings are derivative. The root metaphor is *weight*--therefore, serious, deferential: negatively, one is not to treat one's parents "*lightly*." Thus, honor--as "a weighty Quaker." A short step to awe-inspiring, splendid, glorious, rich (material/spiritual). And God's glory (Presence, Shekhinah [in Kabbala, representing the feminine aspects of deity]). And finally touching on most of the aspects of the "holy" semantic domain.

In trying to experience the meaning, we should get beyond the *transference* model (as 1:1 "dynamic equivalence") to the *collection* model (gathering a bouquet of honoring, glorifying, giving a good reputation to, being deferential/reverential toward, standing in awe of---our earth-parents &, elatively, our heaven-Father).

But suppose one's parents are unworthy of this? Here the Zohar (P.B.115b) sounds like the Mormons: "Parents should be honored even after their death. A meritorious child can redeem an unworthy parent, so that child and parent may dwell together in *Gan* [the future garden recapitulating] *Eden*." (The merit idea is rejected by the NT's doctrine of grace, but it reappeared in some forms of Christianity [& was re-rejected by Luther, esp. in his attack on the Roman Catholic teaching of indulgences].)

The parents-honor Commandment completes the First Tablet (which is primarily honor to God) & segues into the Second Tablet (from vertical [divine/human] to horizontal [human/human] relations). The bidimensional honoring--of God & parents--got deep into me young, & I frequently ask myself how my parents would feel about something I'm thinking of doing (or have done); & it's a special joy when I think they would be pleased (as at Jesus' baptism the Bath Qol [God's Voice] says "This is my Son, who pleases me").

In the Greek Bible (OT & NT), *price* is the root meaning of the word (τίμα *ti-ma*) in parents-honor: Ex.20.12; Dt.5.16; Mt.15.4, 19.19; M.10.19; L.18.20; Eph.6.2). As there is (as Bonhoeffer said) a "cost and joy of discipleship," so of childship. Parents are to be "precious" (Lat., costly, pricey) to us. And a twin-star word in the Greek Bible (δόξα *doxa*) has *reputation** as its root meaning (usually translated "glory," as in the doxologies appended in some manuscripts to Mt.'s Lord's Prayer---"glory" enveloping "hallowed" in the prayer's first line [& thus my prayer in this Thinksheet's 1st ¶])....."Glory and honor" is a frequent phrase in doxologies.

In *Greek* this morning I came upon 1Ti.3.7, which NRSV renders "he [a church "overseer"--lit. meaning; roughly translit.as "bishop"] must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil." I'll

* Or "(good) opinion." Passing the test (so, accepted-approved-welcome). An inn is (lit.) an "accept everybody" place.

paraphrase thus: "Leaders should have a good reputation [wd. usu. trd. "witness"] in the eyes of outsiders [to the Church & the Faith], a reputation that would be ruined were they to [lit.] fall into disgrace & resulting reproach [the wd. includes both], pegged down by the devil." The last phrase is epexegetic, explaining in demonic perspective the immediately previous phrase: Disgracing oneself (as Clinton has) is a victory for the demons, who "peg" (translit. from the Gk.) the disgracer down like a tent (or "nail" the sinner to a cross---or "trap" or "snare" the offender). For the disgrace-reproach wd., Vulg. (Lat.) has "opprobrium," which is often trd. as "scandal" (as is the Gk. wd. here)....The verse & context (indeed, the whole of the Pastoral Letters [1&2Ti., Tit.]) depict the moral, spiritual, & functional requirements for (Christian) leadership.

NEXT DAY: The Clinton four-minute speech is proving to be a religiomoral **thinking moment** for the country. Rushers-to-judgment are clashing with rushers-to-forgiveness. C-Span's long clergy-panel showed how difficult it is to use traditional religiomoral words ("contrition," "penitence," "repentance," "confession," "sorrow," "sin," "guilt," "shame," "disgrace," "scandal," & some other words above in this Thinksheet) when speaking to a general audience. Charlie Rose's panel was brilliant: Buckley, Gomes, Tribe, Cuomo (the Harv. chaplain used Jimmy Carter's phrase for the country, "spiritual malaise"; the four were more sad than angry, & brought values to bear from almost all relevant disciplines).

Clinton's pastor, J. Philip Wogaman, a major American ethicist, in his CHRISTIAN MORAL JUDGMENT (Westm.-J.K./89), details the "Significant Forms of Presumption [ethical presuppositions, biases]" (69-71). His "method of presumption" helps us arrive at moral judgments on matters from smallest to greatest. His parishioner Clinton fails the pastor's test of integrity (30): "thinking and acting coherently on the basis of what one takes to be ultimate good."

Using the category of size/proportion, I sent this message to Clinton on Martha's Vineyard today. Note my minimalist religioethical terminology: I was limited to 50 words...."Mr. President: Extra-marital sex is not a small matter, but lying about it is so common as to be a small lie. You told a small lie to a huge audience. Now that you've admitted both the sex and the lie, God and the country grant you the freedom to get on with your huge tasks."

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