The EGALITARIAN captivity of CHRISTIAN ethics *versus*

the intertextuality (canonical reading) of "the image of God"

"DIRECT US, O LORD, in all our doings with thy most gracious favor, and further us with thy continual help; that, in all our works, begun, continued and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally by thy nercy obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." This is on p260 of THE BOOK OF ENGLISH COLLECTS, & it is referenced (along with 11 other "great collects") on the bottom of #3150: I ran out of space. This great prayer was quoted to me by Dr.Paul Hammer, well-known UCC NT scholar, in gentle complaint that the Thinksheet had not printed it (though he [rightly] suspected it was in the list as the Thinksheet's last line. If you find any relation between the prayer & this Thinksheet, be my guest: it's unintentional.

The THESIS of this Thinksheet is that the American cultural ideal of **equality** has so captured Christian ethics that "Christian" & "egalitarian" now function as synonyms. (The 6th c. BC/BCE captivity of the Jews in Babylon has served, previously, as metaphor for the AD/CE 14th c. captivity of the papacy from Rome to Avignon & for Martin Luther's accusation that Roman Catholic clericalism had captured the church from the laity [THE BABYLONISH CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH, 1520].)

As the subtitle indicates, I shall illustrate the thesis by displaying the contrast between egalitarianism's eisegesis (reading-IN) of "the image of God" & a canonical (all-Bible) exegesis (reading-OUT) of that phrase. This is only one illustration of egalitarianism's captivity of the Bible & thus of Christian ethics: egalitarianism as the **lens** through which the Bible is viewed for supportive evidence.

Should the Bible be the **lens** through which Christians view life, the world, religion, ethics, egalitarianism? Yes, but not with the literal authority the Qur'an has in Islam. We Christians reserve the highest authority for the Word himself, to which the whole of Scripture (when christologically read, as Christians should read it) testifies: "we take every thought captive and make it obey Christ" (2Cor.10.5 TEV).

1 "...every thought...." This commits us to being...

(1) Enemies of ignorance, friends of knowledge-disseminators (as in my today's CAPE COD TIMES letter [herewith], congratulating that paper's new exec for a column instructing the public vis-a-vis the morality & legality of revealing the names of juvenile criminals).

(2) Seekers of God in "all things," the world, human life, through which he interprets himself (Ro.1.20): "God moves in a mysterious way" (sang the hymnist Wm.Cowper), but "is His own interpreter, / And He will make it plain" (bowdlerized in THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL, as "whose truth shall be made plain" [a meaning-change, elininating the affirmation as to who will make it plain--a loss considered acceptable, as required by the rule that the Bible's pronouns for God were not to be used in this hymnal]).

(3) Attenders to the whole Bible (the "canon"), not just to favorite proof-texts. God interprets himself through the whole creation & the whole Bible. So we try to let the Bible interpret itself, intertextually (again, as in this Thinksheet's subtitle).

2 Toqueville had it right: Emigrants from unfree lands, Americans--intoxicated by the fresh air of liberty--tend to overvalue **equality**, the leveler of Old World classism: American egalitarianism is reactive--& reactions are apt to puff themselves up with the hot air of hubris (in this case, overbelief in democracy).

As a work in process, American democracy is very English, stemming from AD/CE 1215, feudal lords forcing the king to share power with them codically ("the rule

Proud to be a part of a grand conspiracy

Cliff Schechtman's Feb. 2 column "Can you do that?"is a good example of the Fourth Estate's civic obligation to enlighten the public.

Enlightening the public is a task the clergy (including me) shares with journalists and educators.

A Princeton history professor who became president of the United States said that what most impressed him about his students was "their ability to resist knowledge."

Let's chalk up this one for the American Experiment. Our educators, journalists and clergy are a conspiracy against the ignorance of the public.

WILLIS ELLIOTT
Craigville

Elliott Thinksheets
309 Lake Elizabeth Drive
Craigville, MA 02632
Phone/Fax 508.775.8008 $20 per year
e-mail: wandlelliott@attbi.com

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of law and not of men"). Under this Magna Carta, equality had three dimensions: (1) the knights' castles were equally free of arbitrary royal coercion; (2) all--king as well as knights--were subject to law ("under law," [in a later phrase] "with freedom and justice for all"); & (3) despite huge differences in estates, the knights were equal in political status (i.e., equally free to make their pleas to king & state their cases to magistrate). NB: While under #1 the knights face the king & under #2 they face the law, only under #3 do they face one another, each conceding to the others the same (equality-of-identicality) political-&-juridical access-status.

The English "knights" who in 1776 signed the Declaration of Independence carried the Magna Carta to the extremity of eliminating the king (Geo.III's "taxation without representation" in-principle violating the Magna Carta). In place of the royal sanction (the codical base of the colonies) they put the divine sanction (God replacing king) & grounded rights (declared, as God-given, "unalienable") in their very being as "created [**politically**] equal": colonial male landholding Englishmen should have the same rights as mother-country Englishmen. (American history shows continued pressures to widen the original meaning to include other human groupings & other "equality" meanings [equality of opportunity, equality of condition--even, nonsensically, biological equality]).

3 Think of the American equality-idea as a **gas** (physical, as well as rhetorical) expanding to fill whatever voids it encounters. When it encounters gender, its expansion makes male & female equal on earth & in heaven (masculine & feminine being equal in God, so equally entitled to representation in language for God). But if the two voids are functions (creations) of the equality ideology itself, their reality depends on the evidentiality of the equality dogma: in the Bible, is it evident that males & females are equal? in the biblical-canonical God, is it evident that masculine & feminine are equal? The answer to both questions is no. But first, let's look at the biblical **words** for equality.

4 In Hebrew ("shwh"), Greek ("iso-"), & Latin ("aequal-"), the physical basis of metaphorical "**equality**" is evenness/smoothness/levelness. When God asks (Is.40.25) "Who is my equal?" he means Is anybody else at my level? Phil.2.6 says Jesus was at God's level ("isa"/"aequalem") as "the image of God" (the NT's emphasis in "image" use) & came down into humanity's "image of God" (in the OT sense, very minor in Judaism & Christianity until feminism's [unbiblical] cooptation of it by modern feminism as a scriptural sanction for gender equality). This NT christocentricty of "image" appears in Gal.3.28 as third-level (§2, above) equality of "men and women" as "one in union with Christ Jesus" (i.e., in church--despite biological, societal, domestic, & political differences).

Secularized by Marx, "equality" was mathematical/impersonal/communism's exclusion of diversity ("to each according to his needs" honored only as a slogan). Contrast the Bible's teaching of "equity" as personal fairness, impartiality, truly to all according to each's need (Greek "dikaios/eikos/isos"). The least is to be treated as you would Christ, & Philemon is to treat his runaway slave "as you would [treat] me [Paul])" (Phile.17).

5 Two instances of this Thinksheet's title-point, both on "the image of God":

(1) In order to force Gn.9.6 to conform to his egalitarian personalism (as in his PhD thesis & his THE GOSPEL OF LIFE), the Pope converts (perverts, reverses) the text's meaning: since the killer is also in God's image, no capital punishment.

(2) The Bible's only other references to man in God's image* are Gn.1.26-27 (embedded in a creation story which is to be read--according to canonical [whole-Bible] hermeneutics--intertextually with the immediately following creation story) & 1Cor.11.7-9 (the only NT reflection on man's creational "image"). Put it all together, & this is what it spells: God created Adam (Hebrew, "man") in his "image and likeness" & found that none of the animals was a "suitable companion" (2.18) for him. Creation being a work in process, God then made Eve (not in the image of a goddess [as in Sumer], there being none) from a rib of Adam (she thus being the highest creature except for Adam, who alone bears God's image [vs.7 of the Cor.text]). Egalitarians read Gn.1.27 as a proof-text, blurring a-b (God's creation of "him," Adam) & c (God's creation of "them," male & female, with no reference to "image"). But the Bible calls us all to bear the image of Christ, which transcends gender.

* Though several on "likeness," translated "presence" in TEV: Ps.17.15 & Eze.1.28. Gn.5.1-2 recapitulates Gn.1.27.