

HUMAN BEGINNINGS/ENDINGS IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD: NO EXCLUSIONISM

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In secular thinking, the kind we learn in our public schools, nothing that happens to us or anybody occurs in the presence of God. In biblical thinking, in & since the Bible, nothing happens to us or anybody out of the presence of God. In Elie Wiesel's DAWN (Bantam/82, p.39f), a man says "death has only eyes. God, on the other hand, has no eyes at all." His companion, who'd suffered multiple tortures as a prisoner, says "God saved me from death....God's eyes were upon me. God is looking at me, I said to myself, and I must not disappoint Him [by false confession]. My torturers never stopped shouting, but I kept my thoughts on God and on His eyes, which are drawn to human pain. For lack of evidence they finally had to set me free. If I had admitted my guilt I should be dead." The choice is ours....Few Americans, however, are a pure type of either consciousness. Most, in my judgment, are about where doomed Sherman McCoy was when his life fell apart (Tom Wolfe's THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES, Bantam/88) & he was being haled off to court on a beautiful day: "How could Nature, Fate--God--contrive such a sublime production for his hour of misery? Heartlessness on all sides. A spasm of fear reached down to the very bottom of his descending colon" (p.654).

Take Sherman's three possibilities. (1) Most Americans believe we're under the rule of nature, so they easily say (eg) "Death is natural, a part of life." (2) Some believe in fate, the bullet with your name of it, when you number is up, etc. (3) Biblical Americans live life in the presence of God, as did Wiesel's tortured prisoner. And without exclusionism: (a) Nothing in human life from beginning to end is excluded from God's interest; (b) God is to be excluded from no aspect of our lives; and (c) The question, in each situation, as to how God is present is not to be excluded from our reflective & prayerful attention.

No surprise, then, that when you read the concordance under "life" & "death" you find the Bible interested in all of human life, its beginning & endings & everything in between. I'll fill out this page with some thoughts on God & human life:

(1) In contrast to the other creatures, God gave us something of himself: "image...likeness" (Gn.1:26f) & "breath" (2:7). The creation stories show God present not just with us but in us!....(2) God is "the living God," on the side of life, on our side for life. This life-against-death affirmation is often expressed in OT by the Hebrew "construct" (two nouns, the second functioning as adjective--eg, "the God of life" = "the living God"). While not every ref. containing "of life" is of this construction in the Bible (in NT, many times the Greek reflecting Hebrew thinking), so often is it so that one should always raise the question. (Some modern translations at some points solve the problem for you.) Think of these words preceding "of life":

tree Gn.2:9; 3:22,24; Prov.3:18; 15:4; Rev.2:7; 22:2,14

water Rev.21:1,6 (cf.4:10f, "living"; Jn.4:14; cf.Jer.2:13 17:13)

book Phil.4:3; Rev.3:5; 13:8; 21:27

bread Jn.6:35 (cf.6:51, "living")

Word 1Jn.1:1 (cf. Jn.6:63)

breath Gn.2:7; 6:17; 7:15,22 (cf. blood: Gn.9:4 Lev.17:11,14 Deut.12:23)

path Ps.16:11

light Jn.8:12

Spirit Ro.8:2 (cf.v.10: "the Spirit is life"; Col.3:4, "Christ...our life")

Prince Ac.3:25 (cf.Jn.11:25, "I am...the life"; cf.Prov.8:35 14:27 Ro.14:9)

way Jn.14:6 (cf.Heb.10:20, "living way"); **ways** Ac.2:28

crown Jas.1:12 Rev.2:10

(2) God is variously represented as presenting humanity with the life/death choice. Eg, Deut.30:15,19 Jer.21:8. In UCC Statement of Faith, "sets before...[us] the ways of life and death."....We are to "lose" our life for Jesus' sake: Mt.10:39 16:25....God & Christ are called "our life," & Jn.6 uses eating (the Supper) for internalizing Christ....God is often the Life-Giver, & "the living God" is a frequent expression in both Testaments....One can be (Eph.4:18) "alienated from the life of God," but in Christ (1Jn.3:14) "we have passed from death to life."