

--second line of Sarum Primer, 1514: "God be in my head, and in my under-standing;; God be in my mouth, and in my speaking; God be in my heart, and in my thinking; God be at mine end, and at my departing."

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

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Helen Keller had the sense that everything she couldn't see, which was everything visible, was **praising God**. Scriptural, that: the whole creation praising God! As I began to write this Thinksheet for a clergy group, I closed my eyes & "accessed" many biblical passages in which visibles praise God. People, of course, but they're borderline: a human being is both visible & invisible, that indeed being, in the biblical languages, the basic distinction in a human being (call it "flesh/heart," "body/soul," or a number of other dualities/pol-aritys). Let's note a few Psalm references (a psalm being [Web.] "a sacred song or poem used in the praise or worship of the Deity" [underlining mine, to show that the two words tend to be used interchangeably]; Heb. name for the Book of Psalms, "Praises" [tehillim, same root as "hallelujah"]). The references are to visibles praising God & are in biblical order: 69.34 (sky ["heaven"], earth, seas & moving creatures therein); 89.5 ("the heavens"); 138.4 ("all the kings"); 145.10 ("all your works"); 148 (sun, moon, stars, sea monsters, fire, hale, snow, frost, stormy wind [indirectly visible], mountains, hills, fruit trees, cedars, wild animals, cattle, creeping things, flying birds--[& humans in these categories:] kings, all peoples, princes, all rulers, young men and women, old and young); & for list's end I've saved the familiar 19.1: "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament [dome] proclaims his handiwork" (underlining mine, to introduce a further biblical word for praise; note, in the Battle Hymn of the Republic, "Glory, glory, hallelujah!").

1 A motif of the Biblical Story is that everything visible & invisible is made to praise God & thus bring itself to telos, fulfillment. Some say that the idea that unconscious beings can praise God is anthropopathism, humans reading into uncon-scious beings a human power-privilege-duty--but how do they know that? Some say that the only reason God asks for our praise is that it's good for us--but how do they know that God gets nothing out of it for himself?

2 Back to **visibles**. If, as the Sarum Primer instructs us, we are to pray that God will be in our eyes while we are looking, will we not see God in all we see because, as it were, we are looking through God as through sunglasses? The analogy is bad: the point of sunglasses is that less gets into our eyes, the point of the Sarum prayer line is that more gets into our eyes than would without the pray-er: God is out there in all visibles, & we need to remove the "shades" that prevent our seeing him....Note two things this isn't: (1) Animism, the notion that *animae* ("spirits") are in all things; & (2) Pantheism, the notion that all things are God (or the slight modification, "panentheism," that God is "in" all things in such wise as that they are essential to his being).

3 Religious **artists** (ie artists who are religious: religion artists paint/sculpt religion subjects but are not themselves religious) educate our eyeballs to see God in-through their artifact visibles whether or not religion is the subject matter of their works. Here I must include photographers. A few days ago I saw a profoundly religious, peaceable-kingdom photo: a wide-awake reclining Great Dane with a wide-awake tiny kitten cradled between the great paws. Humor, yes. Delight, yes. But also wonder & praise, if (as the idiom goes) one has eyes to see it.

4 What I've been leading up to is **sacramental art**, art that serves as a door through which the Holy can come to us. Can you remember a movie that did that for you? We Christians call sacraments certain ritual acts, especially Baptism & the Eucharist, that are doors through which the Holy comes to us even though we don't sense it every time we participate in those sacraments....Can you list a few paintings & sculptures that are for you doors of the Holy? And buildings? And, to go beyond the plastic arts, music & dances?

But for this talk we're stick with sacramental paintings, paintings intend-ing to open the door of the Holy through the common wall of daily life, paintings

that say to us "Please praise God through me!" Of such paintings I have several with me, originals & photos, corresponding to the branches of the Church:

orthodoxy

A 15th-c. Russian icon, "The Trinity." It's the favorite prayer-visual of Henry Nouwen, & my copy comes indirectly from him. It's venerated in Russian Orthodox churches on the day of Pentecost. Father, Son, & Spirit, all winged, are seated around a table on which is a single food. By Andrei Rublev, the ikon represents the Trinity as the three guests of Abraham (Gn.18). Our side of the table is open for us to be drawn into the life of God, & inverse perspective accents this invitation. The Son's wings touch the wings of the Father & of the Spirit, signaling the divine unity & mutual indwelling. For the Orthodox, praise-worship is participation in the life of God....This icon appears on the cover of the best book on inclusive language, *SPEAKING THE CHRISTIAN GOD: THE HOLY TRINITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF FEMINISM*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Eerdmans/92).

roman catholicism

The "Adoration of the Lamb" (by Hubert van Eyck, in 1432 completed by his brother Jan), the polyptych (20⁺ panel) altarpiece, St. Bavo Cathedral, Ghent, is a landmark in the history both of painting (the first painting in which the pigment was mixed in the oil) & of Christian devotional art. It cannot be moved. I must tell you how Loree & I came upon it. In his tiny car, an old Dutch farmer with whom we'd overnights in his ancient tiny home drove us south across the border into northeastern Belgium to the van Eyck's home city, Bruges, in their century, the 15th, northern Europe's commercial & financial center, then on to Ghent--both cities of canals & bridges, like Venice. In the cathedral we were stunned by the great painting's riot of still-brilliant colors; concentration of lines on the enthroned Lamb in the lower level of panels & (directly above the Lamb) on Jesus Pantocrator (the All-Powerful; on which my #2662); & the blend of post-Gothic realism (as in the Adam/Eve shutters for the upper-level panels) with apocalyptic idealism--the whole moving the heart to shout "(H)allelujah & Hosanna & Holy-Holy-Holy," familiar praise-phrases from our Jewish & Christian heritages. As in the icon we saw that our side of the table was open to our coming with praise & thanksgiving, so here--in as radically different a painting from the icon as can be imagined--the way to the Lamb is open to us to add ourselves to the processions converging at the Lamb's altar-throne. We want to make that walk; & as we do, we see at the upper level angel choirs praising the Lord Jesus, at whose sides are Mary & Jn. Baptist. The painting is late medieval, but the theme is time-transcendent (past, present, & future joining in *pantodologia* ("all your works...and all your faithful" offering praise, Ps.145.10)....Why Jn. Baptist with Jesus? Because he said (Jn.1.36, cp.29) "Look! here is the Lamb of God!" Jesus as the Lamb of God is mentioned 27 times in Revelation. Rev.4-5, the earliest description of Christian worship, contains five hymns full of praise-words, including (3 each) glory, honor, worthy; also power, wealth, wisdom, might, blessing. The first hymn begins, as does the Lord's Prayer, with the hallowing of God's name: "Holy! holy! holy!" Synonyms: hallow-sanctify, glorify, praise. The glory that will appear at the end-time appears whenever praise of God occurs: it is the realization of eternal life here & now. This painting visibilizes Jn.1.14: In Jesus, we behold God's glory (*shekinah*, presence).

protestantism

Two centuries after the van Eyck brothers, & not far across the border north, Rembrandt, Christianity's greatest painter of the Holy in the common, on a street in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam, asked a Jewish rabbinical student to pose for him. The result the world knows as the "Head of Christ." What realism, impossible without the van Eycks' breakthrough! What revolutionary audacity to ask a non-Christian to sit for a portrayal of Jesus! If you use the painting as an icon, you as a Christian will re-experience the incarnation. And you may think of what a 2nd-c. Christian theologian, Irenaeus, said: "The glory of God is a human being fully alive."....I close with two paintings (the first & last of a series of 30 covering the Bible) of a student of mine, John Locke (both interpreted in my #1125: "Genesis 1" & "Revelation 21f"). Same woman looking up in praise in both.