"My God IS" WHO/WHAT?

It's Holy Week again, our annual Christian remembrance/celebration of a **victory** won "once for all," for all time & potentially for all people. From teaching on it these past two Sundays, & from simultaneous happenings "out there," I muse thus:

1 Jesus did not have this Thinksheet's title's question. He had been taught that Yahweh(YHWH)--"the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (& Moses & David & the Prophets) (1) was *his* God & (2) would prosper "the righteous," the piously observant in ritual & life. On the Cross, he was as far as possible from being prosperous & as near as possible to surrendering providence-belief, his God's providence of what he needed to survive & thrive. But when from the Cross he cried out to heaven, it was not to all the gods (to cover the possibilities for help) or to some alternative deity he'd been thinking about switching to. It was to his same God, the One whom Father Joseph & Mother Mary had taught him obedient love to. He cried out....

2 ....**Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani**, Jesus' Cry of Dereliction from the Cross (M. 15.34; in Mt.17.46, "Eli, Eli, lema s."--more Aramaic than Hebrew, though the Jewish Palestinians (including Jesus) may have spoken a mix of these two cognate languages. (NonJewish Palestinians, who seem to have been the majority in Galilee, spoke Greek; Jesus' employers, when he worked as a builder, expected him to be Greek-understanding; & the Roman authorities may have expected him to understand at least commands in Latin.) The words, in Hebrew, begin Ps.22: if Jesus was quoting the Ps. (as he oftened quoted Pss. [Psalms]), need we take "abandoned" with as great force as we would if it were his own word-choice? (He quoted from the [Aramaic] targum; if he'd been quoting the Hebrew, he'd have said "azabtani.")

3 In biblical religion, the "**my**" of "my God" is passive-active: we are made, then "own" (& own up to) the Maker; we are redeemed & so possessed by the Redeemer, whom then we accept, claim, own, possess. "We love him because he first loved us" (1Jn.4.19; some manuscripts, instead of "him," have either nothing or "God"). In both creation & redemption, the divine initiative is clear; but devotionally, the emphasis is on mutuality: "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (Song of Sol.6.3).

4 "Eli-" in names read (in Semitic languages) from right to left means either "____is my God" or simply "____is God." Either way, the affirmation is personal (parental, in hope that the child will confirm that affirmation), the meaning identical: the speaker is naming his/her deity, the category denoted in Semitic by "El" ("power" probably being the root meaning).

Now take **Elijah** (El-i-jah). Right to left (identity to category), it's "JAH [Jah=YHWH] IS [MY] GOD." Transposed (as in this Thinksheet's title), "[MY] GOD IS JAH [usual Eng uppercase, "the LORD" or "GOD"]."

To see how Eng. translations use CAPS to tell you where "YHWH" (Yahweh, God's personal name [revealed to Moses, Ex.3.14-15: CEV, "I am the eternal God....whose name is 'I Am.'....This is my name forever, and it is the name that people must use from now on."]). "El" was generic for deity, "Yah[weh]" was specific, viz. *Israel's* deity. In Is.50.4, this specific identity is represented in the all-caps words thus: "The Lord GOD" (KJV, REB, NRSV, CEV, TANAKH; "Lord" representing Heb. "Adonai"]), inferiorly (in my opinion); "The Sovereign [for "Adonai"] LORD" (TEV, NIV, NLT). Why inferior? Because, while I prefer "LORD" for "Yahweh," dropping Eng. "God" is not wise (& "Sovereign" is an Eng. word with no devotional standing).

5 "My God is the LORD" (i.e., the name "Elijah," which happens also to be [through Scottish corruption] my last name [Elyot, Eliot, Elliot, Elliott]) is as much the OT creed as "Jesus is Lord"["LORD"]" is the primordial NT/Christian creed. In the early Christian Bible (all Greek), κύριος *kurios* was YHWH in the OT &, usually, Jesus in the NT. It became the bridge categorical title for the Persons of the Trinity. And this title factored in the Roman persecution of the Christians: it

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was the commonest title of the Emperpor (Gk., "Kurios Kaisar"; Lat., "Imperator").

6 Back to §2: We stand under the Cross & hear someone mishear Jesus as having called on Elijah (Mt.27.47; M.15.35)--as though Jesus were calling for kingdom come here & now (as in the OT's last chapter). Why Elijah? As "Moses" was the personal symbol of Torah, "Elijah" was of Nevi'im (the Prophets). In the 10th c. BC/BCE, Yahwism (the essential OT religion) had to (1) adjust to a strange new politic, viz. monarchy, & (2) resist syncretistic dilution of the Patriarchal faith, & (3) counter the temptations of royal power & economic prosperity. In the next c., the cultural crisis came to sharp focus in the Yahweh/Baal-Asherah confrontation (1K.18.20-40: Elijah sees to the execution of the 450 prophets of Baal [& presumably also the 400 prophets of Asherah]): **radical, exclusivistic monotheism.** Down with both syncretism & pluralism! Elijah became the icon of this puritanism, which would endure through the true prophets to the End-time (Mal.4.5: he didn't die, so was available for the wrap-up as he'd been for the start-up; & [vs.6] he was to effect intrafamilial reconciliation). Some thought Jesus was Elijah redivivus (Mt.16; L.9); others thought Jn.Baptist (Jn.1.21). The Elijah icon is the guarantor of **faithfulness** to the past & to the divine promise, & of **resistance** to impurities of thought, worship, & life. Christianity is wholly in this tradition....

7 ....but as monarchy & its cultural accompaniments was the New Threat three millenia ago (Nathan confronts King David; Elijah, King Ahab), multiculturalism today erodes all exclusive claims, including Moses-Elijah-Jesus-Christian monotheism. When Billy Graham's successor-designate says Islam is "an evil religion," our culture's regnant relativism rules him out without considering the possible truth of his statement. Increasingly the religions are being taught in our public schools, but not neutrally: the curricular materials specify that the children are to be taught religious relativism, viz. that the religions are "all good." Some old sycretisms have aquired new energy since 9/11: Bahaism (preaching Baha'ullah as "the Promised One," in the succession of Abraham-Moses-Jesus-Muhammad-Bab) broke away from Islam in the 19th c. soon after its origin as a Shiite-Sufi-Gnostic mix (& it's present television offerings are sophisticated appeals based on our society's perceived needs for social equality, family stability, & character ed). Besides, new syncretisms are being born, two being URI (the United Religions Initiative) & Transreligion ("trans" here meaning getting "beyond" the religions to a global culture of unselfishness).

8 Elijah wasn't paranoid, they really were after him & his religion. We have a word for letting your sensorium be swamped with signs of opposition, imbalancing your soul. That word is **fundamentalism**, the diametrical of Ahab-like syncretism. What Osama binLaden is to "the West," the Rev. Carl McIntire was to American mainline Protestantism & the World Council of Churches. His NYTimes obit two days ago calls him "a fiery radio evangelist who preached an amalgam of fundamentalist Christianity and hawkish patriotism" on "more than 600 radio stations" & berated Billy Graham for impure association with pro-communist religious liberals ("a cover for the apostates"). He founded the Bible Presbyterian Church, The Christian Beacon (a weekly newspaper), "his own seminary," "a resort and conference center," the American Council of Christian Churches, and the International Council of Christian Churches! "His daughter said he had always offered the opportunity ["to present opposing views"] but no one took him up on it." If that were not false, the FCC would not have withdrawn (in 1970) his broadcast license. On radio he spent four programs (four hours!) attacking me personally,* & never invited me to respond. (My employer, the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, on my behalf sued him for $1 million.) Elijah? Yes, but enough already! (Like Francis Schaeffer, he was a graduate of Westminster Seminary, formed as dissident from Princeton. The Presbyterian Church USA "withdrew his credentials as a minister" as "guilty of 'sowing dissension within the church'.")

9 "My God is____?" Eliagav (...lust); Elicoach (...power); Eliosher (...wealth); Eliyediath (...knowledge); Eliazmiyuth (...myself). Yes, I made up these Hebrew names on the "Eli-jah" model. But the biblical God, Yahweh, Creator-Lord-Redeemer of "all things," calls on "all" to worship him "only" in Jesus' name: Jn.14.6; Ac.4.12; Phil.2.10-11. "A wideness in God's mercy" & a narrowness in the Call.

* Playing clips (& attacking each in succession) from my three-hour national-radio debate with Maj. Edgar C. Bundy (U.S.Air Force Intelligence, '42-'48), for a quarter-century the director of the ruthlessly anti-left Church League of America. A powerful antagonist of "deviant" sex, he was fired in '82 for both pedo- & ephebo-philia (both prepub. & immediate postpub.) boys in his employ.

NYT 3.22.02

Carl McIntire, Evangelist And Hawkish Patriot, 95

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

The Rev. Carl McIntire, a fiery radio evangelist who preached an amalgam of fundamentalist Christianity and hawkish patriotism, died Tuesday in Voorhees, N.J. He was 95.

His daughter Marianna Clark said he had lived in the same house in Collingswood, N.J., since 1939.

Mr. McIntire used his daily broadcast, once heard on more than 600 radio stations, mainly in the South and the Midwest, to deliver his stern message: most Protestant churches leaned toward Communism; the lust for power by the "fascist" Roman Catholic Church had to be stopped; and any attempt to coexist with Communists was doomed.

Even other fundamentalists were targets. He said that Billy Graham had become "a cover for the apostates" and that Southern Baptists were "soggy" compromisers.

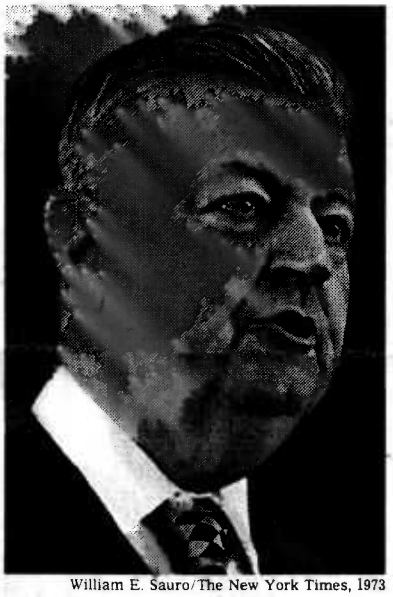
The shows went into swift decline after the Federal Communications Commission agreed in 1970 with protesters in Media, Pa., that the radio station there did not meet its fairness doctrine, requiring the opportunity to present opposing views. It refused to renew that station's license. (His daughter said he had always offered the opportunity but no one took him up on it.)

Within two months, more than 200 other stations had dropped him. At the end, Mr. McIntire was heard on a single station, in Camden, N.J. But he fought his losing battle with flair. In 1973, he tried to broadcast from a pirate station on a former mine sweeper 12 miles off the New Jersey coast. What he called "Radio Free America" went off the air after it interfered with another signal.

At his peak, his influence and that of the Bible Presbyterian Church he founded were amplified by his weekly newspaper, The Christian Beacon; his own seminary; and a resort and conference center on the Jersey Shore.

Mr. McIntire — a large man who liked to be called doctor on the strength of his honorary doctorates — was a master of spectacle. He picketed meetings of mainstream religious groups like the World Council of Churches. With the Rev. Billy James Hargis, another fundamentalist, he sent balloons carrying pages of the Bible across borders to lands behind the Iron Curtain.

Seemingly no stand was too controversial. In 1948, he said the United States had a moral responsibility to strike the Soviet Union with atomic weapons.



William E. Sauro/The New York Times, 1973

The Rev. Carl McIntire

Carl Curtis McIntire was born on May 17, 1906, in Ypsilanti, Mich. He grew up in the Oklahoma Territory, where his father was a Presbyterian minister and his mother a missionary to Indians.

He attended Park College in Parkville, Mo., but followed his father to the seminary. After receiving his degree from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and being ordained, he immediately began criticizing the church's liberal missionaries. An ecclesiastical court found him guilty of "sowing dissension within the church" and withdrew his credentials as a minister.

After the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. dropped him, he left group after group in a search for purity. He started the Bible Presbyterian Church, a new denomination, in a revival tent. He left the National Council of Churches and formed the American Council of Christian Churches. His answer to the World Council of Churches was the International Council of Christian Churches, which continues to flourish.

In support of this search for purity, he often cited St. Paul's letter in II Corinthians 6:17: "Wherefore come out from them, and ye be separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing."

His first wife, Fairy Davis McIntire, died in 1992. He is survived by his wife, Alice; his two daughters, Marianna Clark of Cherry Hill, N.J., and Celeste McIntire Bashaw of Pennington, N.J.; his son, Thomas, of Toronto; 13 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.