FOOD & "THE EXCESS POPULATION" ---------- ELLIOTT #2017

The Jews have a delightful festival in which they enjoy rejoicing in the defeat of infamous Haman, who got himself hung by overscheming against the Jews. We Christians have a delightful festival (Christmas: I'm writing this 22 Dec 85) in which we enjoy both beating up on old Scrooge and rejoicing in his "spirits of Christmas" conversion. (Not that that's all there is to either Purim or Christmas!)....This thinksheet's title signals my "say-it-and-see-what-happens "spirit" (a phrase of Geo. Will's vis-a-vis Lee Iacocca) *re* something that's been eating at me for several years, viz, the mindless-planless "If they're hungry, feed 'em." My current tentative position on this frightens me because it cuts across (1) the biblical (Jewish & Christian) preachment of compassion & (2) Jesus' express feeding commandments. Don't bother to read on if you're inveterately prejudiced against even imagining that either or both of these inculcations may be wrong: your mind is closed, and you'd be wasting your time.

1. It's a Cape Cod custom for Monika, author Dickens' granddaughter & Cape Cod resident, to read publicly at Christmastide "A Christmas Carol." She can say "Mr. Scrooge" with proper Christian loathing! His expressed reason for not contributing to the Christmas poor-fund was that it would interfere with Darwin, viz, the natural killing off of the unfit, ie, "the excess population." Every Christmas, Scrooge the unconverted seems wiser: this Christmas, the avg. woman in Kenya has 8 living children (having had 13), and the pop. is expected to double before the year 2000--a flood of human flesh poured forth into a world of hopeless human squalor. And at the present time, 8 organizations are appealing to me to keep all that mass of excess flesh alive!

2. I have my choice of viewing. I can see the suffering mass of flesh, or (as in the appeal ads in print and on the tube) I can see one suffering baby. "Pro-lifers" (translation: anti-abortionists) ask me to see one fetus who may become Beethoven, and the cynical-sentimental pitch enrages me. And I don't want to see any photo of a 9-year-old child weighing less than 30 lbs.: I am to live my life in God in the world with peace, joy, and daily gratitude to God, and I want photography to aid me in this endeavor (as well as to challenge my peace of mind, without overupsetting me). The "real (and immediate) need" of a sufferer is that the suffering be reduced: the "real need" of the human mass (the total tonnage of humanity) is that the mass of suffering be reduced (which, distributively, means of course that fewer human individuals will be suffering: it's unfair to accuse us who speak of "mass" or "the masses" of not caring for persons--a reverse of if we were to accuse the individualists, who care for an individual rather than individuals, of not caring for persons but only for a person and then another person).

3. Our species, given our body-size, is astonishingly fertile and, increasingly, disastrouly able to protect the individual against death from the nipple to the everlasting arms. (We have more than doubled longevity since Luther, and infant mortality is being reduced far more rapidly than is conception. Yes, theoretically-technically we can provide food for almost any x-increase of population, contrary to Malthus; but "the population bomb" inexorably depletes and pollutes the good earth, which God has given us to tend and maintain.)

4. A religion's emphasis on compassion is good when-wherever compassion needs emphasizing. Eg, Mohammed's Arabia: "The Compassionate" is the first of God's 50 names; or, when Buddhism was more talking about suffering than doing anything public about it, Amida Buddhism,

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especially in its radical-grace Pure Land forms; or Jesus amid the maelstrom of Roman Palestine and Jewish party-fragmentation (Jesus in the succession of compassion-preaching Hebrew prophets and synagogue-oriented Pharisees). But the past's assumption holds no longer: we can no longer, while preaching and living compassion for HUMANITY, assume that in the process we'll not irreparably damage the good EARTH. Instead of being unfaithful to the compassionate God if we do not mindlessly answer the call of hungry humans, we are now unfaithful to the compassionate God if we do not put our minds to how we can be symbiotically compassionate simultanteously to the earth and to humanity. To meet this new challenge from God, we shall have to face down sentimentalists who see us as unfeeling, cruel, and even "unChristian." And ACLU will get us if we don't watch out: mindless defenders of Enlightenment Man the Individual.

5. I understand Barth's diametrizing of revelation and religion, declaring thus Christianity as not a "religion" (searching for God) but the Truth (God searching for, and self-disclosing to, humanity). That is the natural rhetorical stance FROM WITHIN Christianity. But if a Christian is, under God and face-to-face with the rest of humanity, under obligation to step also outside of Christianity and into "simple" humanity (which is theoretically impossible but pragmatically-operationally possible and necessary), one thought-sequence will run like this: No one religion could be appropriate for every circumstance: every religion, including Christianity, is (1) sometimes appropriate, (2) sometimes useless, (3) sometimes a hindrance, and (4) sometimes both a help and a hindrance. One would expect that I, a Christian, believe that Christianity is less often in category #3 than is any other religion--which is the case. (Ie, it is the case that I so believe, whether or not it is the case that it is the case!) As for feeding the hungry, Christianity is in category #4: it's a help in that the 3rdIsaiah-Jesus model of what's come to be called "direct-care giving" (appearing in Judaism as a rich conception of "almsgiving," the religious obligation parallel with prayer) rivets the Christian's attention on the needy ("good news to the poor") and has resulted in the world's most astonishing and steady burst of charitable action; it's a hindrance in that attention to IMMEDIATE human need tends to myopia against INVISIBLE, REMOVED, & REMOTE human needs (political, technical, ecological, ethical, esthetic, spiritual). Literalism is a severe problem here. Eg, Jesus' parables seem so immediate-individual (but, in light of our new global-local situation, we'd do well to take a new look at "seem"). It's so easy to let direct material care, compassion-driven, subvert reason: not letting your one hand know what the other's doing becomes not letting your head know what either hand is doing.

6. Consciousness-raising on the biosphere is rising arm-in-arm with consciousness-raising on nutrition and health and with the psycho-spiritual understanding of space (eg, in such phrases as "open design," "human scale," and "the natural environment"). A few weeks ago, Barnstable Co. (central Cape Cod) voted $17.1 million to buy private land against the developers: 84% of us voting voted to raise our taxes for this purpose. Why? To keep the woods and marshes "useless" (to developers, to rapacious humanity). The vote, which was solidly pro-environment, could be viewed also as anti-humanity in the sense that it puts a brake on population-increase. Long Is. does not have its own fresh water, nor would Cape Cod if we were to have the population increase we'd be sure to have if we did not declare open-public space (whose beauties are why people want to move to or vacation on Cape Cod). Humanity/ecology is a trade-off? No!