

*Gn. 3 points to the positive value of ignorance, which is to our consciousness what the ozone layer is to our bodies: Promethean knowledge now threatens to destroy the ozone layer, which is our only protection against fatal solar radiation. Knowledge is power; but the notion that it's inherently good is now proved to be dangerous nonsense.

A letter today (6Dec83) is from a correspondent with a what-the-hell attitude toward typos: overstriking is easier than repairing invisibly. If he'd been neat, he'd've deprived me of the blessing in this thinksheet title. (His text is "not a soft faith full of heavenly promises, but a faith open to darkness as well as dawn")...THINKSHEET OCCASION: Introductory to a series of early-Sunday-a.m. forums on "Our Perplexities and Our Faith," to begin 1Jan84. Here are some of the leader's premises:

1. People, peoples, history--all are fragile and should be labeled "HANDLE WITH CARE." An underneath fragility: NATURE. An overarching fragility: FAITH. The older one gets, and the older history gets, the more impressive is this fact of fragility.
2. Without faith, this fact of fragility is depressing; with faith, it's bracing. Faith abides at the intersection-point of heaven-durability and history-fragility--eager to entwine the two into the strength of hope, as Simeon/Anna, old man/woman beholding the baby Jesus in the Temple (L.2.25-38). Yes, I believe in tough hope, proportionate to my faith-learning of God's tough love.
3. "Revelation" is God speaking to us through our metaphors and metaphysics: it is through them, not in them; and Scripture warns us against idolatrizing them. One of the sad fathers of the nuclear age (sad because a sensitive human being in anguish over the nuclear threat to human life), Niels Bohr, says it well for me: "There are two sorts of truth: *trivialities*, where opposites are obviously absurd; and *profundities*, recognized by the fact that the opposite is also a profound truth." Ignorance and arrogance proclaim absolutes: knowledge and humility confess relativity and the human need for (E.S.Ames) living 'a relative absolute." (Cf. Sinic yin/yang + the West's *coincidentia oppositorum*).
4. My relative absolute is "Jesus"--in quotes because I mean the man + the traditional-orthodox meaning of (Jn.Knox) "the Christ-Event." He is the signal-symbol-substance of "the desire of all nations" (Hag.2.7, as promise; in Christianity, as present-future fulfilment in Jesus). Pagans, coming in to Christianity, enriched the Jewish metaphor-metaphysicalhope; but the basic symbols, forevermore, are Jewish--as in Simeon ("waiting for the consolation of Israel," "he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ," "my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people,/a light for revelation to the nations/and for glory to your people Israel") and Anna ("spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem").
5. Meaning is futuric: we live-motivate our lives out of the future into the past-present. Latin has two futuric prefixes, viz., *prae-* (which refers mainly to space, including the underness, the ground, of "premise"), and *pro-* (which refers mainly to time, what goes "forth from," as a promise--rather than what provides a "beforehand" to a thought or argument). To put it another way, the promiser becomes, if the promised believes the promise, the premise for the thought/life of the promised. And again: A promise is an existential premise, a "given" from which the believer-in-the-promise extrapolates the logic of living and thus life itself. Biblically, the promises of God are (Hebrew) *d'varim*= actions/words bearing the already/not-yet quality--supremely, in OT the Exodus from Egypt (+ the Return from Babylon, and in NT Jesus' Resurrection (+ his coming Return). God's promises-as-deeds are intended to be, by God's grace, our fulfilments-in-life.
6. Human life is assumptional in both the logical (so "premise") and the existential (so "promise") senses. In this dual sense, everybody lives "by faith"--trust in their way of "thinking" and of going for pay-off. If the way of thinking eventuates in negative pay-off, the thinker is proved a fool: "modern scientific thinking" is worse than nonsense if its users eliminate the human race (a deed we're more and more apt to do: nuclear dust and smoke, it seems, would eliminate sunshine for at least a year and thus eliminate agriculture and thus us). Both ignorance* and knowledge have positive values: "fact" sometimes is "truth"'s enemy.

OVER

7. Not only are our human ways of seeing relative; our human means of seeing are limited. Reflect for yourself on some analogies to these physical facts: (1) No eyes in the backs of our heads; (2) Poor peripheral (side) vision (in contrast to most fish); (3) Inability to see out from inside both a male and a female skinbag (on which compare our Cape Cod flounder, which has eyes only on one side of its body). Of these three limitations, the third is by far the most disabling and most interesting. In the absence of women, men suppose they are seeing/thinking/feeling as whole human beings; the active presence of women first insults and then destroys this supposition. Vice versa, women are foolish who suppose they can see/think/feel as men. (Of course humanity is hormonally a gray scale with transpositions: generalizations about male and female hold only *almost* in all cases.) As "the image of God" in which we're made includes both male and female, "word of God" cannot be heard by listening only within one's own sex: I am more apt to hear "word of God" from Loree than from any man alive, for only the beloved woman can complement-complete a man's seeing/thinking/feeling. (One might mythize this thus: We have two run-throughs on earth, one in each of the two types of skinbag; though during the second trip we forget the first one, upon our second death we remember both and so, for the first time, have a whole human consciousness. This myth is not as nonsensical as the current notion that androgynous consciousness is achievable within either a male or a female skinbag.) (4) Lack of both macro- and micro-scopic vision, parallel with the fact that "the visible spectrum" is only a tiny stretch within the electromagnetic spectrum. We, by technology, extend our vision in both directions; but in both directions we run against the limits of our brain's programmability. In this mold also we face the fact that we live almost entirely within the pentagon of our five skinbag senses. (5) Inability to see very long: we're dead just when we got a good start at learning to see/think/feel/live. How wasteful of God that we never get anywhere near fulfilling our potential! But is that something that can be known? No, since we can't "see" enough into the afterlife to know....This "heavenly premise" is that since we are largely ignorant creatures (knowledgeable enough to sense, within the diameter of our knowledge, the circumference of our ignorance), we should cultivate explorative curiosity, expectant listening, humble kindness, courage, and trust/trustworthiness.

8. Hell is "finding yourself" while looking for God. TV interview of Al Pacino: *A.P.*: "I was depressed for a long time." *Interviewer*: "Till you found yourself?" Biblical religion is so finding God as to be convinced that God has found you; the Stoic, anytime anywhere, defines salvation as finding yourself--currently the most "in" religion in American education, counseling, and media; so in that most folks as much assume its truth as a fish assumes water. In light of my "heavenly premise" of biblical salvation as (here also all Buddhisms agree) deliverance from egocentricity into (here no Buddhisms agree) theocentricity, this current common American assumption is a "hellish premise."...NOTES on premise #8: (1) Not every depression signals waywardness from God, but biblical religion makes this its first heuristic assumption; so, if the interviewer had made the biblical assumption, he'd've said "Till you found God?" Indeed, this is what interviewers say on the Christian Television Network (which gets none of my time). (2) "While looking for God" may be conscious or unconscious; it means reaching out for deliverance from the depression, and biblical religion views this as reaching out for God. Stoicism is the natural religion of current hyperindividualism (as Hinduism is the natural religion of scientism: at Alamagordo, Oppenheimer quoted Krishna). Many Stoic converts from Christianity say "I don't have to go to church to be a Christian." Stoicism is the religion the public-school system uses tax money to promote, in violation of the current version of "separation of church and state."

9. God exceeds me/us in power, wisdom, love, and justice--being more for me/us than I/we can be for ourselves. So God, as understood and experienced in our biblical religion, is (Bonhoeffer's near-death letter, which is on my study wall) *ganz gewiss an jedem neuen Tag* ("entirely trustworthy every new day"). So Bonhoeffer could say of his death "This is the end, the beginning of life."