

ADDENDA to Elliott's 2 May 84 reply to Williams' C.C.NEWS, same date

1. You say "reverence is a part of prayer" and consider this not a reversible proposition: i.e., prayer is not necessary to reverence (so my letter correctly, indirectly, accuses you of "separating prayer from reverence"). WHAT reverence? My printed letter makes clear that I'm not talking about reverence in general but about a particular reverence, viz., AMERICAN HERITAGE reverence, viz., biblical religion coming to us through the New England American Revolution (viz., Puritanism) and the Middle Atlantic American Revolution (viz., Enlightenment Anglicanism-and-deism). American Heritage reverence, including Judaism, is consistently theocentric--yet Williams never mentions God in his letter, not even at the point where he comes closest to defining reverence: "Proper discipline, decorum, respect for life, the world etc." No wonder his letter does not engage mine!

2. The same charge he levels at me I level at him: So I'm utilitarian on prayer (wanting it in the schools to "make everybody good")? He wants to see to it that there's reverence in the schools for the purposes of "proper discipline, decorum, respect for life, the world etc." His argument against me here is at least specious if not also hypocritical. One need be only responsible, not moralistic, to look to the moral consequences of anything done in the schools. Further, my printed letter nowhere says "prayer" would make people "good": (1) My letter was about reverence, not "prayer"; and (2) My letter does not deal with the effects on students, good or bad--but only with the effects on school and nation. And this is NOT a specious distinction: liberal religion, being anthropocentric, imagines that the point of religion is that it's to be good for people: humanity manipulates deity for the good of humanity. Kierkegaard called this the ethicization of the esthetic in the interest of avoiding the religious. In hanging me with scheming to use religion-in-school to make the students "good," Williams reveals his own anthropocentrism. Then he uses his straw man to excoriate me for not coming up to "the 'Christian' understanding of prayer"! On this matter he is grinding his own corn, not processing my letter.

3. Narrowmindedly, Williams forbids the word "reverence" to "the schools of Iron Curtain countries": "Change that word 'reverence,' to fear!" I object: (1) His special claim on the word is provincial, as any dictionary will show; (2) His neat, eristic separation of the two words would make Ronald Reagan smile; Mr. Williams here is playing into the hands of the mindless antiCommunism that's at the heart of America's present disastrous foreign policy. All human beings are taught "fear" and "reverence," the package differing with culture, subculture, ideology. My claim was and is that a government should be expected to engender the package peculiar to its people, and that our schools have betrayed that expectation (aided and abetted by government itself!).

4. Williams practices liberal reductionism on the "fear of God," which in Biblical language means awe, mystery, reverence"--but not fear! As an old biblical scholar, teacher of Hebrew and Greek, I find this astonishing (and even a worse bastardization of Scripture than the "Inclusive Language Lectionary"). Then he defines fear as "anticipation of danger or peril." Israel's prophets precisely warned that continued unfaithfulness to YHWH would lead straight to ruin: that's the prophetic content of the phrase "fear of God." And the ruin would be direct divine action, not by the (Greek-and-modern) sanction that we are our own worst enemies. And Jesus: "Fear (only) Him who can cast you whole ("soul and body") into hell." Williams and Marx teach not to fear God: a dismal partnership that distorts private/public realities.

OVER

Marx treats fear as useful (which, indeed, it is), Williams treats it as naughty. Marx was not a product of America's public schools; presumably Williams is. Because of the current educationism (B.F. Skinner et al), "reinforcement" (a psychobabble term for intentional education) has been moralized: negative (such as fear) is bad, positive (such as praise) is good. Williams preaches a religious version of this nonsense. To do so, he must retailor the biblical God to fit the new suit of educational clothes. Like the Communists, he practices both reductionism and revisionism.

5. Note how he applies his idiosyncratic "reverence" and "fear" to his own early life: "There were some teachers in my school days that I 'feared' because they were authoritarian and in some cases mean and cruel. I certainly didn't revere them. Just the opposite." What about those teachers who were authoritative but not authoritarian--or is that a distinction Williams' philosophy of education would permit? Grammarians have words for Williams' tendentious-rhetorical use of the two words: he makes ELATIVE (positive, upbeat, "yes") use of "reverence" vis-a-vis what he likes, and PEJORATIVE (negative, downbeat, "no") use of "fear" vis-a-vis what he doesn't like. If one habitually uses only this rhetorical mode of discourse as to a word or words, one (1) loses the sense that one is speaking rhetoric, deluding oneself into imagining that the rhetoric is reality (the same psycho-process as in schizophrenia), (2) loses the ability of rational discourse with (a) those of other rhetoric and (b) those who shift from their own rhetoric into nonrhetorical discourse, and (3) sees as in a funnyhouse mirror those who are of other points of view (which is obscurantism or fundamentalism, a mood and mode not exclusive to rightists). This whole sad scene makes not for unity (in state, church, or any other relation and institution) but for arrogance and scattering.

6. How cure that confusion of rhetoric and reality? One process is to reverse the particular elative/pejorative valence. E.g.: "Schools in Communist countries teach reverence, in American schools we teach only fear." Then do your best to sustain both halves of this compound sentence. An isotonic-anaerobic exercise for the mind. NOTE: Dictionaries are, with few exceptions should be, compromises of denotata/connotata. Like our genes, they set the range but do not specify the action. Used with intelligence and caution, they help many ways--one being to expose unconscious rhetoric, which (like subliminal advertising/propaganda) enslaves, dupes, and delivers one to causes alien to human solidarity, as well as making one feel (evilly) good when (wrongly) rejecting a fact or (rationally unexamined) opinion with (probably) an arrogant spirit. Williams said he "certainly didn't revere" "authoritarian," "mean," "cruel" teachers: I say he did and doesn't know it (as he reveres God, whose action seems, objectively, often "authoritarian," "mean," "cruel" as life is often so and faith has stories that theodically deflect the charge so it doesn't hit God). Honest religion (such as Isaiah 45) combines a healthy understanding of fear with a realistic view of God; it deals with God's dark side as well as bright side (not "God is Love" as --Ashley Montagu claimed in my debate with him--reversible to "Love is God").

7. Williams: "Dr. Elliott does not understand the Supreme Court rulings nor the First Amendment regarding prayer in school." There follows an exposition so obvious that I must be a nitwit not to understand it! Without explaining, he says religion and education are now "not separated." Then he confuses "establishment of religion" (which referred to having an official sect, as Anglicanism in Va.) with various current proposals as "establishing religion"--a semantic expansion which is antihistorical and invalid.