

SCRIPTURE AS AUTHORITY, A PERSONAL REFLECTION ----- WILLIS ELLIOTT #1953

Everything else on this broadsheet (British: I say "thinksheet") should be pondered in the light of the existential fact that it's being written by one who's read Scripture devotionally daily in the original languages for 1/2 century. I obtrude this fact, exposing myself to the possible accusation of boasting, because it sets me decisively on the side of the Bible-intoxicated (Jn. Wesley's homo unius libri)...NOTE: (1) "In the original languages." While more gifted in math and science than in language, I gave myself to language study for improved access to the Word of God and the Word's improved access to me. (2) "Devotionally." My daily Scripture-discipline has been and is a form of prayer, God being "end" and the Bible "means." One might undertake assiduous Bible study objectively, only intellectually, to become scholar but not saint (both goals being elusive!). I have not (but claim that one's intellectual apprehension of Scripture is improved by liturgical-devotional orientation). (3) If I'd "done" Bible daily for 1/2 century in any other than the original languages, I'd be a Bible student but not a Bible scholar (any more than I could be a Buddhist scholar without being able to handle Pali or a Hindu scholar without being able to read Sanskrit)...For the rest of this one-page piece, some PROPOSITIONS:

And see #1954.

1. God calls us to be free in, with, and from Scripture. In the Bible, to know it; with the Bible, to use it in living and witnessing; from the Bible, to hear and obey God beyond it ("The past has a voice, not a veto."). The faithful Jew or Christian earns the right to the 3rd by daily attending to the 1st and 2nd, as no one else has as much right and duty to criticize my wife Loree (with whom I've been living intimately-blissfully for 4/5th as long as I've so been living with Scripture) as I have.

2. The Bible never has had, never can have, a rival as the sanctuary of Jewish and Christian audio-images. "Be still and know that I am God" is not parallel with the pop-mystical phrase "the sounds of silence": earth has known no noisier peoples than those who wrote the Bible, viz., Jews and Greeks--who needed to be told to shut up so they could "hear the Word of the LORD"! Biblical congregations (Jewish & Christian) should become familiar with the irreducible handful (better, mouthful) of these holy sounds ("amen" being one of them). This "language of Zion," or audio-lexicon, even if only in translation, is the unique medium of communication-communion among the faithful. Call it "Bible-speak." Those for whom Bible-speak is only babble are outsiders to the faith community, or at least illiterates in the community (with all the tragic implications of illiteracy). Congregations who've let Bible-speak wither away are weak in faith, in witness, in holy love, and in "missions"--though, partly as substitute, they may be hot for "causes."

3. As more rhetorical than reflective, the Bible is much more a book of images (like balls, which you can't build with) than of ideas (like blocks you can): it's more directly available to (would-be) saint and artist than it is to philosopher, theologian, scientist. One implicate of this dimension of the nature of Scripture is that the images, which behave as symbols--sacraments rather than as mere signs, are of a piece with revelation (in the current phrase, "revealed metaphors") and so not reducible to generalizations ("ideas" from the cubing of balls!). It's worse than pathetic that some theologians are now struggling to get rid of "Father," our Lord's favorite address for God--even though Jesus specifically instructed his followers so to address God.

4. For the faithful, the Bible is the only possible authoritative literature bridging then-life to now-life. Consequently, those persons, congregations, communions neglecting continuous Bible-absorption become first amesiac about the Faith and then alienate from it--and it's sadly ludicrous to pretend this is not so. The Faith doesn't disappear from history, but Bible-neglecting "believers" do disappear from here-and-now Faith-reality. In 1980s America, the "mainline" churches ("evangelical") are displacing the old mainline churches, which are becoming the "oldline" churches. The UCC is shrinking more from Bible-neglect than from "social-action" positions: our malaise is spiritual.

5. The Bible is for everyone, but hermeneutics is a science, "a comprehensive interpretive methodology" (as I put it in the title of my first doctorate, 1943). Read the Bible till you feel-know it's reading you; love God through the Bible till you feel-know God is loving you through the Bible. But be humble enough to confess you need us Bible scholars in order to "love the LORD your God with all your mind." The Reformation principle of universal access has degenerated into the nutty notion of universal experts.