

Here are some BACKGROUND OBSERVATIONS on this theme. A better term might be CONTEXTUAL, because these notes are about economic-social-political realities in "the biblical world," realities forming the context in which God's revelation of his will and nature to Israel occurred--a revelation inherently (a) economic-social-political in both the intra- and extra-communal senses and (b) eristic-theocratic, God-and-his-people embattled by cosmic-historical opponents, who cause suffering but face ultimate defeat [therefore, neither advaistic-monistic nor Zoroastrian dualistic].

1. My first thinksheet on this mentioned Geo. Mendenhall's breakthrough in grounding "the covenant" in ancient Near Eastern politics, specifically the suzerainty pattern of imperial benevolence. Confirmation of this view is in three of the works of Norm Gottwald (a Heb.-and-Gk. student of mine of long ago, now at GTU Berkeley). Today [21Oct76] the just-published SUPPLEMENTARY VOLUME: THE INTERPRETER'S DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE hit my desk, and I was delighted to find the relevant articles written by Geo. and Norm! [NYTS Library cop. is now here.]

2. Whatever "human nature" is, it includes the perpetual welling up of these ultimate questions: *What power(s) do we have to do with, and what is/should be our relationship thereto?* The transhuman-that-stands-over-against-us is experienced as promise and threat, reward and punishment, benevolent and malevolent, under many metaphysical metaphors and constructs. In our faith tradition, the early tendency was to open up the range of imagery as Israel's Kulturkampf with neighbors near and far demanded more articulated expositions of [to take a phrase from "Jesus Christ Superstar"] "What's a-happening?" In the space between the intimate and the Ultimate, angels and demons faded in [gained at least quasi-ontological status] and [e.g., Heb.1] out. Chthonic furniture seemed appropriate to exegeting the dark drama of repeated defeat, and the worldly anti-forces of the prophets [chiefly, imperial designs along the Fertile Crescent, and Israelite monarch's unending temptation to enter into fatal alliances] were largely replaced by the unworldly anti-forces of the apocalyptists. The temptation of latter-day "people of God" was and is the freezing of apocalypticism in psycho-form, viz. gnosticization [fundamentalism, Jungianism, Teilhardianism, the "inner journey" dogmatic strain in the human-potential movement], which always (a) cops out on history and (b) sees "the poor" [the non-gnostoi, who have not the higher truths], if at all, dimly. In biblical perspective, this provincialism of soul, individual and/or communal, is demonic, an achievement of "the principalities and powers" both cosmic (Satan's machinations against God-and-his-people) and historic (Weltschmerz, e.g. only 50% of the electorate anticipated to vote in the upcoming presidential election, and "giving up" on our cities).

3. Intentionality is, in the whole biblical tradition, a "heavy" in the understanding of personality. Personal centers of consciousness, with or without skinbags, are present to all our dealings with reality. Divine aid is essential if we are to survive the malevolence of Satan in heaven and of his demons in the air between heaven and earth--demons that try to infest our consciousness [therefore, exorcism] and skinbags [therefore, healing of body] (the emph. in the gospels), and our society [mini- and maxi-relations, the emph. in "Paul": "powers" (Ro.8.38), "rulers" (1Cor.2.8), "thrones" (Col.1.16), "dominions" (Eph.1.21)--all of whom Christ deprives of their power (Col. 2.15,20)].

4. Ancient Near Eastern urban complexes "housed" [Beth- ] each its god [so, temple] and the god's steward [so, palace]: "separation of church [community based on persuasion] and state [community based on coercion]" didn't begin with God's revelation to Moses, supremely-finally dramatized in the crucifixion of Jesus, the event undoing the demons' power to confuse love and fear. Jesus' death sophisticates us against expecting love from politics ["the powers"] and thus frees us to deal with politics [=all forms of coercion, control, psychic and physical violence, oppression, exploitation] realistically, effecting maximum possible aperatures for persuasion [e.g., suffrage].