

LIBERATION THEOLOGY, further notes on,
especially in light of end of my course

"Class, Nation, Race, Sex in the Old Testament".....Elliott #913

1. "-ism" is slippery! When we bring our world of concerned rhetoric up to the Bible's parallel world, neither reality nor language dovetail neatly, yet the Bible's our most fundamental source of ethical awareness as it appears in our language of "-ism" and "consciousness-raising." Students in this course, working directly on the OT text, experienced the polar tension of the Bible's similarity/difference: it's "home," and we can't go home again, but we can and should keep in touch ["Don't forget to write home!"]. [More broadly, we "the West" are all alumni of the Judeo-Christian tradition.]

2. What's distinctive of the Bible, here, is its radical consistency--in dealing with class, nation, race, sex--in theocentricity. Which is the same as saying that in its final form it was dominated by the "YHWH-only" prophets [Moses, Amos, Jesus, Paul]. This exclusivity is saved from parochialism and provincialism precisely because the particularity in which it's based is not a partisan claim for one human grouping over another [=the essence of "-ism"] but on the contrary a representative claim for our species under one nonhuman sovereignty. Further, the passage from particularity to universality is not by the imperial way, viz., violence, but via suffering love. The Bible's "wild surmise" [Santayana's phrase, of Columbus] is not that the world's a globe or that [as Brahmanism and the Hindu cults flooding the West right now] reality's one [spelled "One"] but that cosmic-historic suffering love is the penultimate and final answer to all evil in cosmos-history-heart, all illness, all illusion, all fraction and false claim ["injustice"]. [I asked a cabby yesterday whether he saw any connection between his failure to get compensation ten years ago from his radiation lab for his skin cancer--any connection between this injustice and Jesus' dying: "Christian theology" begins with making this connection. Human nature, not just theology, leaps from experience to ontology--both for reality-orientation (clarity and comprehensivity) and for community (the "by all" in Western Catholicism's formula "everywhere, at all times, by all"). Our Christian identity is in and through the good news of this suffering love and our own identification with sufferers ["involvement"]: liberation theology is Christian not as humanization without or alongside of evangelization, but integral with it.]

3. Suffering love is the major clue to how the experience-to-ontology leap can be saved from being also an imperial leap, i.e. a leap to inauthentic-oppressive power: the sufferer of this sort is meek, humble, modest in claim for self-and-group, practicing sensitive listening (allowing for differing personal-and-group tempos), aiming at reciprocal creativity ["the release of potential to the glory of God," in my phrase], and open to change [=to "the Kingdom of God"] while bold in proclaiming the truth as presently apprehended by faith-revelation/reason. If pluralism is to be liberation instead of only mutual respect and peaceful coexistence, we need to receive differences as divine assignments: three cheers for the girls and boys, and --on the U.S. scene--for the red, white, and black [in historical order]! This is the best prophylaxis against etatism [shrines-cooptation into the Human Center, as in Israel, Japan (folk--shrine Shinto into state Shinto), U.S. (Nixon's White-House worships)] and against the parallel hubris of "revolution" [and ideologies thereof].

4. Theologies arise, crash against the shore of "the times," and subside into the sea of "historical theology." They are all partisan, and the quality of their partisanship determines their worthiness to make an abiding contribution to the Great Tradition. Thus, now, with "oppressed/oppressor" or "liberation" theology. The "o/o" antipodality is being critiqued for its accuracy, adequacy, energy [motivating power], and futurity [prospect for contributing to world and church]. Class (Third World), nation (Ellul), race (Cone), sex (Ruether)...next?