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WILLIAM STRINGFELLOW

c: Schoonover and Webber

10 May 77

Dear Bill--

It's been a decade since you and I were doing theology together on a Polaris sub, and half that time since your invitation to come to Block Island. What occasions the contact this time is my reading, today, your CONSCIENCE AND OBEDIENCE: THE POLITICS OF RO.13 AND REV.13 IN LIGHT OF THE SECOND COMING (Word/77), and being moved to make a few connections and animadversions:

1. In *Stevens v Berger*, a federal case won against the government two months ago, the government claimed that Rev.13 is nonpolitical and therefore to be ruled out of defendants' allegation that "the Beast" [rather, dual beast] represents the ever-instant threat of government encroachment on religious liberty and the life of the religious. As biblical expert for the defense, I was able to convince Jewish Judge Jack B. Weinstein, who claimed complete ignorance of "Revelations," that the Bible has in it nothing quite so completely political as John's Revelation. So I was chucklingly delighted with your present book's reversal of the usual assessment of the two 13s!...Among the xeroxes from 21 books I provided the judge with were 2pp. from your AN ETHIC..., of which your present book is plainly and patently sequel. [Weinstein's 35-p. opinion is in my office here at the seminary.]

2. I read your new book after doing #974, which agrees with you in relating judgment-punishment and hope [and raises a neglected point in so-called "Holocaust theology"]. Your p.14: "the elementary link between ethics and eschatology...is that the topic of both is *hope in its relationship to judgment*." That's very close to Amos Wilder's 1932 Yale PhD thesis, published more than a decade later as ETHICS AND ESCHATOLOGY IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS. The dynamic integrity of the eschatology/ethics stranding is indeed judgment-hope; and my PhD under Wilder developed "the prophetic and eschatological sanctions" [among other early Christian sanctions]--on which see the enclosed #233 and #962, now being used in my course under Mel called "Motivation and Ministry." [I.e., Mel is dean of the program area in which I'm teaching the course: STM/MPS.]

3. A flash from reading your purpose as "to affirm a biblical hope which comprehends politics and which transcends politics" (p.9): after the trial, the chief federal lawyer, feeling she'd lost, said to me in disgust, "Why do you care about *them* [the indigent family who'd foregone public assistance by refusing to let the four children get a Social Security number because of "Antichrist" and "the mark of the Beast"]?" "Well, to begin with," said I, "I'd be scared not to, remembering Jesus' opinion of clergy who 'pass by on the other side.'" As for defendants' lawyer, it was [see his letter, herewith] "the most rewarding experience of my legal career" and has resulted in his return to the Faith after a long stretch as a dropout.

4. Finally, a "Yes!" to your affirmation that "Biblical politics are alienated from the politics of this age," so that we cannot with integrity use an ideology [as most liberation theologies tend to use Marxism] to explicate and drive the biblical vision. The following thinksheets [enclosed] of the past few days speak variously to this: #970, #973, and #974.

Shalom!

*William Elliott*