

CONVERSATIO MORUM

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Thoughts for a Monday Morning

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PUTTING GOD ON TRIAL

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I have met people who have serious issues and make raging accusations against God. Sometimes they are prisoners who blame God for every sorry and sordid detail of their lives. Sometimes they are victims of crime or injustice or natural disaster who rage against a God who would allow the innocent to suffer. Others are just cynical sceptics who cannot make sense of the world and have simply come to the conclusion that God cannot be trusted. To me, such accusations, rage and scepticism is understandable. Particularly in the face of natural disasters one does wonder, if there is a God – why do such horrible things happen? We even call these terrible natural disasters “acts of God,” and if that is what they are then surely God must be accountable for the toll of human tragedy.

According to a lawsuit filed by Ernie Chambers, US State Senator in Nebraska, God must be held responsible for such “crimes against humanity.” Recently Senator Chambers filed a lawsuit in the District Court of Douglas County, Nebraska (Docket 1075, page 462) seeking a Permanent Injunction against God.ⁱ Referring to God as “the Defendant,” he states that God is “also known by various aliases, titles, names, and designations and is the admitted perpetrator of the deleterious acts complained of in the lawsuit.” The lawsuit complains that God, through his agents, has committed the following crimes against humanity including: ongoing “terrorist threats that are credible based on defendant’s past conduct in history; fearsome floods, egregious earthquakes, horrendous hurricanes, terrifying tornadoes, pestilential plagues, ferocious famines, devastating droughts, genocidal wars, birth defects, and the like”.

The lawsuit might simply be a frivolous publicity stunt, but it reminds me of a remarkable collection of essays and speeches by C. S. Lewis published in a book entitled “God in the Dock.”ⁱⁱ The book was based on an analogy that Lewis made suggesting that modern human beings, rather than seeing themselves as standing before God in judgment, prefer to place God on trial while acting as His judge.

I can neither explain nor excuse God when it comes to the diseases and disasters that shake people’s belief in the very existence of God, much less a God who is good and merciful. I will admit that it makes no rational sense to me at all. And it is not only in response to calamity that non-believers and even some believers demand that God be held to account. St. Matthew’s Gospel tells the story of leaders in the religious community who confront Jesus demanding that He give account for His teachings and miracles -- “By what authority are you doing these things?” they demand, “And who gave you this authority?”ⁱⁱⁱ -- By what right does God presume to act in ways that don’t fit our categories or meet our expectations?

And when God does not act as we would like or as we would expect, is the problem with God or is it our expectations or theological categories that are the problem? We live in a world where we judge a painter by his paintings, a composer by her music, and writers by the books they write. Infrequently do we judge or understand the music or the art or the literature by the nature and the character of their creator. Perhaps, if we knew the artists well we would be less inclined to judge them on the basis of our appreciation or understanding of their art. As Job experienced amid a saga of total victimization, the only

meaningful way forward comes through a personal relationship with, and faith in the Creator. It is a relationship that changes my perspective.

*Who is this that obscures my plans
with words without knowledge?
Prepare to defend yourself;
I will question you, and you shall answer me.
Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?
Tell me, if you understand...
Who shut up the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb,
when I made the clouds its garment
and wrapped it in thick darkness,
when I fixed limits for it
and set its doors and bars in place,
when I said, 'this far you may come and no farther;
here is where your proud waves halt'?
What is the way to the abode of light?
And where does the darkness reside?
Do you know the paths to their dwellings?
Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?
Let him who accuses God answer him.
Would you discredit my justice?
Would you condemn me to justify yourself?'*^v

ⁱ <http://www.duhaime.org/LawMag/EntryID/42.aspx>

Also as reported in an article by Associated Press Writer Josh Funk (Tuesday, August 5, 2008 7:20 PM EDT)
"Senator Suing God Urges Judge to Proceed"

ⁱⁱ "God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics" C.S. Lewis (copyright 1970 by Trustees of the Estate of C.S. Lewis, ISBN 0-8028-0868-9)

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Matthew 21:23

^{iv} Job 38:1-4; 8-11;19,20 and 40:2, 8 (TNIV)

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