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## RE-IMAGINING GOD

1 One of my favourite Christmas gifts this year has been the volume All Creation Sings (Augsburg Fortress 2020), a supplement to Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW).

2 All Creation Sings (ACS) contains a treasury of riches. Two new musical settings of Holy Communion, numbered consecutively from ELW as Setting 11 and 12, one (11) in Spanish. A new Service of Word and Prayer. Fifteen pages of new collects and prayers, including prayers of lament. A fine selection of new hymns, numbered consecutively from ELW beginning with 901 and extending to 1100! And a splendid collection of Additional Resources, including among them the usual indexes.

3 But of special interest to me, among these Additional Resources, is a three page listing of Scriptural Images for God. Ground-breaking!

4 So for example in these pages we can find God imaged in scripture as a quality (example: truth). As an element of nature (example: sun). As an object (example: fortress). As an animal (lamb). As a woman (midwife). As a man (bridegroom). As an embodied person (eyes). As a human being (parent). As a divine being (son of man). Three full pages of this kind of thing!

5 It's the imaginative scope of this section of the book that gives me permission, so to speak, to take the risk of sharing with you the following paragraphs. I'm being bold in this posting to Re-Imagine God.

6 In my old age, I have become more and more dis-satisfied with the traditional view of the Christian God. I grew up – maybe you did too – thinking of God as a kind of Cosmic Santa Claus. "...He's makin' a list / checkin' it twice / Gonna find out / who's naughty or nice..."

7 THAT image of God is simply not persuasive any longer to me in my old age, particularly when I consider the advances in 20th and 21st Century science. I sympathize with atheists, who also cannot endorse that view. It seems, well, childish. Unscientific. Too intellectually incredible.

8 Suppose, instead of the Cosmic Santa, we were to think of what Christians call God as a metaphor for the Three Great Intangibles in human life: Goodness, Truth, and Beauty? I give you liberty to choose your own Three Great Intangibles...

9 Two qualifications: A) The language of religion is closer to that of literature than to that of science. Poetry, Myth, and Metaphor are all part of the language of religion. My (Lutheran) Theological Tradition honours both science and religion. My tradition does not fear poetry, myth, or metaphor. A good myth for example is not a story that never happened; It's a story that always happens...

10 B) Second qualification: Huston Smith, the great scholar of religion – He taught at Syracuse University where I served as Chaplain for almost 20 years – says the universal human religious impulse is, at heart, a Loyalty to Life's Intangibles. Makes sense to me.

11 Now these Three Great Intangibles – Goodness, Truth, and Beauty – are as old as the Greek philosophers. And they are each full of meaning.

12 Goodness in my view includes love as an act of will, even of the unlovely. Goodness includes what an earlier age called righteousness. Gentleness. Empathy. A striving for equality. A sharing of pain and sorrow. A sense of humour (Yes!). Humility. Patience and forbearance. And so on...

13 Truth for me includes justice. Integrity. Courage in the face of adversity. Steadfastness. A sense of resolute purpose. Decency. A sense of responsibility. An eagerness to repent of perceived wrongs. An openness to wholesome change. An honouring of tradition, but not at the expense of necessary change. And so on...

14 Beauty in my view embraces an appropriateness to its context. A harmony in all its parts. A balance in all its parts. Proportion. A sense of surprise. Ingenuity and inventiveness. Creativity. A willingness to adapt to new circumstances. And so on...

15 An example: The Christmas Stories in Luke, with the Bethlehem birth, and shepherds and angels, and in Matthew with the Wise Men and the wicked King Herod, are probably both myths. Bible scholars today believe Jesus was born and reared in Nazareth.

16 But they tell great truths (see 9 above): How the unlettered and unsophisticated (shepherds) can recognize Goodness and Truth, etc, before power and wealth (King Herod). And how power and wealth often try to murder Goodness and Truth, etc...

17 This approach to the Christmas stories makes more sense to me in my old age than the Cosmic Santa. Of course there is much more to be said about all my points above.

18 But be my guest: You can retain your Cosmic Santa, if that is more persuasive to you. My own thinking is traveling along the lines I spell out above 8 - 17...

19 A subsequent Essay will Re-Imagine Prayer.

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