

The God-of-the-Marginals Thesis

The tendency is for people to presume that myth is a language for communicating religious ideas and since the Bible begins with a series of mythical stories, and consistently continues thereafter to use mythological language, they naturally then go on to assume without further ado that the Bible is a religious text. In this way they come to imagine it was written so as to persuade others *that God had chosen to reveal the secret of how humans should behave, eventually sending his own son to perform a demonstration since mankind had turned out to be recalcitrant*. However, the truth is that it is most unlikely that this is the correct explanation of why the texts were written since an examination of the mythologies of the ancient Near East shows that, in the first instance, myth was used as a language for talking *ideology* not *religion*. Ideology being a function of *ordinary human perspective* unlike religion which is a function of *divine revelation* – whether one believes in such a thing or not.

As far as can be determined from their literary remains all ancient civilisations in the Near East were ideologically conservative: centrarchal and *status quo*. Naturally therefore, just like conservative newspapers today, all ancient mythologies presented a commentary on and understanding of the world determined by the conservative perspective of those who produced them – in the case of the ancient world the priestly administrative elite. We find no ancient mythology advocating liberal ideas simply because no bourgeois revolution, necessary for the birthing of such ideas, had thus far taken place. In a like manner we find no socialist ideas either. Indeed, were it not for the presence of the Bible itself we would be hard pressed to isolate any trace of an anti-*status quo* (revolutionary) ideology in the ancient world.

Undoubtedly it was the anti-*status quo* ideas found in profusion in many (though not all) biblical texts which gave the Bible its cachet and ensured its survival over the centuries against the odds. But if there are no revolutionary liberal or socialist ideas to be found in the Bible, then what is the nature of the anti-*status quo* ideas identifiable therein?

As I see it, what the anti-*status quo* biblical writers advocated was not the adoption of a *bourgeois* or *proletariat* perspective to challenge the all-pervasive, *aristocratic* ideologies of the time. Rather, what they advocated was an adoption of the perspective of a certain group of revolutionary *marginals*. The fundamental belief of this group was that only marginals are in a position to be aware of the flaw that continually threatens human society (civilisation). This flaw, stemming from the common though hypocritical conviction that those who get in the way of civilisation's advance deserve to be trashed, is the belief common to all civilisational ideologies, whether conservative, liberal or socialist: *that it is justifiable to marginalize certain people to further the common good*.

I label this *anti-conservative* position, found nowhere else but in the Bible – a position not to be confused with either *liberalism* or *socialism* – the *god-of-the-marginals* ideology and it is important to understand that my use here of the term 'god' does not imply that I see the Bible as constituting a religious text. For as I see it the anti-*status quo* biblical writers adopted an ideological stance which they talked about and discussed in the only way, as ancients, they knew how – by using the language of myth. Employing this language an ancient would have been quite justified in claiming that Robespierre 'worshiped the bourgeois god' and Marx 'the socialist god' and it is in this non-religious, ideological sense that my 'god-of-the-marginals' label is to be understood.

In claiming the Bible is essentially an ideological text do I imply that it shows no interest in religion? Not a bit! Manifestly the Bible has a lot to say about every aspect of human life, including religion. However, it is important to be aware that in the anti-*status quo* biblical writings, as in our present-day newspapers – which too are ideological texts that comment on everything under the sun – religion is just a *secondary* matter, along with other important things such as poetry, psychology and sex.