

1. Chalice....for my patron saint, Olaf, martyred 1060 A.D.
Story and song by Anne Pryor and Aileen.

2. I've ~~xxxxx~~ been aware, in an academic way, that the Bible has been more central to Judaism and to Protestant Christianity than it has been to Roman Catholicism. But only in organizing this series has it really come home to me, when some of you with Catholic backgrounds mentioned the differences between your own experiences and mine. When I asked Rosemary Dorney to read the Sermon on the Mount, she said she hadn't read the Bible as a young person and only possessed one after she was grown up....and then a King James version at that. And when the program committee met to discuss this program, Anne Pryor protested that my proposed title, about Bible stories, neglected her background --- she learned many stories about saints, few from the Bible. So we changed the title of the program to include saints.*

So let me begin with my own saint story, about my patron saint, Olaf. (When my parents gave me my middle name, they weren't thinking about the saint.....Both of my grandfathers were name Olaf, and one grandmother was named Olava.) Last year I visited the spot where Saint Olaf was killed in a skirmish, and it was moving in a number of ways. Olaf I was credited with bringing Christianity to Norway and also with unifying Norway as a state. I might note that this fits with a fairly strong sociological generalization, that something like monotheism has developed in societies only as they also develop a centralized state.

Olaf was killed in 1060. Soon after his death, the rock on which he lay as he bled to death was credited with miraculous curative powers; they built a little church over it and painted the walls with that distinctive medieval Scandinavian imagery. People made pilgrimages to the site from all over Scandinavia. Just by accident we stopped at a medieval church in Sweden later, out in the country overlooking a lake, that had been constructed as a way station for pilgrims on their way to Trondheim and Sticklestadt. I could really identify with those medieval pilgrims, having come there on a kind of pilgrimage of my own.

Then in the 16th century came the Reformation. The Lutherans made war on saint worship and image worship. They threw out the supposedly miraculous stone on which Olaf died, and it hasn't been seen since. And they painted over all the images on the wall of the church. I could really ~~identify with that~~

* Even when I became an atheist and anti-Christian, it was still a Bible centered atheism. For well over a year I had long arguments about religion with my two best friends, who were fundamentalists. I pored over the Bible looking for inconsistencies and things that contradicted science. My friends studied the evidence against Darwin's theory of evolution, pointing out inconsistencies in that and evidence against it... I learned a lot about the Bible in those arguments.

identify with that too, with the Reformers in their stern monotheism and their campaigns against religious magic and superstition.

That's the way it was when my mother left Norway, and for her the wars of the Reformation remained very much alive. She was so intensely intolerant of Roman Catholics as to make me a bit ^{uncomfortable} ~~embarrassed~~. But in Norway, in the 1920's and 1930's, they tried to recapture that early medieval Christianity. They removed the painting on the wall so that one can see again vestiges of the earlier images, and they added some 20th c. images of their own. In that part of the world, the wars of the Reformation are over. I can identify with that too.

2. But let's turn back to the Bible, to a story in Genesis that is of central importance to Judaism, Islam, and to Christians like Søren Kierkegaard, the story where God commanded Abraham to offer his only son Isaac as a burnt offering. (Gen. 22) It is a myth associated with one of the most important festivals of the Muslim calendar.....

.... George Calden will read the story as retold by Woody Allen.

.... Woody Allen is good at this sort of thing. Cf. O'Flaherty in Daedalus Spring 1980, p. 99.

3. And now ~~xxxxxx~~ I invite you to offer your Bible or Saint story that you would like to share with us.

4. I was a high school socialist, one of three in my high school. I suppose it was my main form of adolescent rebellion, since my father was a very conservative Republican. The Bible story I liked best at the time was in the Gospels, in each of them, here Mark 10:17-31. See? Jesus was a socialist too. I read the life of Jesus by Karl Kautsky, the early 20th c., German Communist, who argued that this was the essence of early Christianity, that all those miracles and the Resurrection story were just myths added on to the early pristine stories by later writers.

My fundamentalist friends, by the way, said I had misinterpreted the Gospels by making Jesus into a socialist. They said that there was a 'camel gate' in Jerusalem through which a camel could pass only on its knees. The moral of the story was that the rich should be humble before God, not that they couldn't go to heaven. I couldn't answer that at the time. Only in preparing for this series did I discover that the story about the

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camel gate is a very old one, made up by early Christians, who were eager to conciliate the rich. The story is preposterous on the face of it. Can you imagine a camel walking on its knees through a gate?

(Robert Grant, EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIETY, ch. V)