

This thinksheet is more a caution to myself than to you, dear reader. But the fact that you have it in your hand proves I think you too may need the caution--a warning against freezing yourself into a stance, getting stuck in a role-category you've made yourself a specialist on, letting your persona get typed (as they say in showbiz, meaning both that your public doesn't want to see you in any other role and your agent won't take a chance on booking you in any other role). Good Lord, deliver me/us! I fear hypocrisy in myself, that my distaste for single-issue-ers and single-stancers will make me a specialist habituated to the habit/tendency/urge to view all such creatures with loathing while not noticing that I myself have become one of them. So to some prophylactic (maybe also curative?) musings.

1. Viewing with ANGER, the angry-person stance. This is one element in the makeup of a healthy Biblical prophet; Elijah and Jesus and all of them in between were never satisfied with the way things were, always shortfuse in their reactions against what/whom they saw as in violation of the will of God. In postBiblical history, the English Non-conformists--Bunyan, Milton, Defoe--are among my favorites. The last was accused, by a contemporary, of "ever Snarling at Establish'd Power" in his activism and his literary efforts for the rights of Dissenters (as in his ROBINSON CRUSOE, which is a political pamphlet in the form of a delightfully entertaining novel)....I went through a period of radical "snarling" alienation from all established power except ecclesiastical and "movement"; of late, while still alienated from the secular "world/flesh/devil," I've cooled down my ardor for ecclesiastical and "movement" power, esp. for snarlers within church & "movements." Some recent thinksheets of mine have snarled at some church-& "movements" darlings--eg, Tutu--who mix dollops of ignorance and hypocrisy in with their thunderings.

2. Viewing with BEMUSEMENT the laughable-weepable human scene. Biblical religion (in the Wisdom literature, and in the Wisdom strand of Jesus) allows some distancing from the world, but not a Montaigne amount (who literally viewed the world, and wrote of it, from his own private tower; Willis, beware of the comforts-consolations of your Craigville!). Yet some of us need to help others of us to at least slightly more distance, for insufficient distance freezes one's inner eyeballs into myopia (as many who've used their eyes much for short-distance work find the longer distances blurring and have to get spectacles for their near-sightedness).

3. Viewing with all-purpose COMPASSION. You can't have everything, and Mother Teresa probably (1) won't get to be a woman and (2) will get to be an official saint. But oh how rigid and wild her pronunciamientos when she gets out of her field! Myopia again. But how terrible for anyone to be lacking in compassion, empathy (literally, "feeling into" another's feelings), to be farsighted like Montaigne with no spectacles for seeing the close-up! Such a person fits the next category:

4. Viewing with CONTEMPT, disdain. Not the contemptus mundi (the Latin of traditional Western ethics: being an enemy of "the world" so as to be a friend of Christ, the Church, and the poor), but contempt for humanity (as, eg, Schopenhauer). This is the temptation of those who've been life-hurt and have found no "balm in Gilead."

5. Viewing with CALCULATION of moves toward "liberation." On the 6 a.m. NPR I hear regularly Michael Harrington, who's become almost as redoubtable and endurable a socialist presence as were Norman Thomas & Eugene Debs before him. As he views the changing scene everywhere with eyes focused on the possibilities of change toward socialism, how natural that everywhere he sees plots and ploys designed to preserve the

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status quo. (Maybe it's naughty for me to enjoy so much anticipating what he's going to say about each emerging national-/world-situation: the fact that I'm almost never wrong shows how faithful he is to his paradigm, his "thing," than which there's hardly any better thing available. My point here is that this very predictability shows that he's frozen into--or, if you prefer, dedicated to--his cause. And this frozenness is one element in every definition of "fanaticism.")

6. Viewing with APPROVAL. Part of this is laziness: disapproving takes more energy, esp. mental-spiritual sweat. Part of it is timidity, sometimes downright cowardice: "Most of the evil that thrives does so because good people stay silent." And part of it is ambition, going along to get along. But part also is one's sense of proportionality: I'll approve of this because, although I actually don't approve of it, I approve of the wider picture, the broader aims of my group (as a friend of mine recently said "I left my national-church-office job because I was more and more hearing myself say things I didn't agree with, and I was making the same noises as the others because peer pressure to conform with the going opinions of my colleagues was so successful that to buck it would have been to become an instant outsider"--a syndrome in all peer groups but esp. those whose existence depends on public approval--the approval of churches, church members, citizens, eg). Owen Chadwick called this habit/tendency/urge "the tyranny of present opinion" in one's group or wider society. I've lived long enough to see many instances of this psychotropism (=psyches turning in the direction of the current estimable idea--eg, "liberation theology"--or person--eg, Hitler.) Much of it is innocuous; but human freedom has always depended on hearing another drummer, turning to another sun (heliotropism being the base for my coinage, "psychotropism"). In his latest (NARRATIVE AND TIME, vol.I), Paul Ricoeur says something like this (I have it only from memory): For the sake of present possibilities, the world must be stable, established; but for the sake of larger possibilities, our world needs to be subverted. Viewing with approval is the opposite of the subversion God, and our own humanness, calls us to.

7. Viewing with ALARM. Nukenuts, eg. Alarmists on various current frights seek to paranoidize the public, even small children in schools. Not that there's never any place for alarmists. Loree and I have just finished reading Ezekiel with its alarming percentage of screamings and screechings as to the peril everybody in the ancient Near East wasⁿ because of God's anger for various reasons; and neither of us would vote to remove Eze. from the canon. It takes all kinds, no? I've quit going to "peace" demos; they're ury, vacuous, negative, alarmist to the point of turning off the public with the too-frequent cry of "Wolf!" If all this marching is having any effect, it's negative: it strengthens Reagan's self-image as a hero battling to defend America against inside enemies ("peaceniks") as well as outside enemies. But would I get on board if our peace movement suddenly moved from embarrassing feebleness to robust strength? I don't know; I know only that then I'd have to take another look. My central dilemma is (1) that I'm Jesus-called to be a peacemaker ("Blessed are..."), so I must act toward peace in all its dimensions, but (2) at the moment, I see no way of effective witness toward international peace. I was a strong supporter for 20 years of the Peace Academy idea; but now that we have it, it's become a captive of the Pentagon and the Oval Room.

8. Viewing with SUSPICION. Sociology of knowledge has improved our skill at this. Eg, feminist "hermeneutics of suspicion" warns us to stand back from the Bible and remind ourselves that this is the boys talking, the girls being in the wings and only rarely appearing on stage. But I'm suspicious of that suspicion (on which see my # 2005).