

While the two verbs are mine, the root idea of this Thinksheet on theological standards (the colloquy's basic theme) comes from Otto Rank, who in my opinion deserves to be as sung, among Freud's immediate followers, as Carl Jung, but hasn't been. The root idea is that we human beings have two equally powerful urges ("drives," "instincts") for whose release we are responsible, having the **will** to determine their release severally (as the **driver** of a two-horse team, though I'm not aware he used this simile).

A theological standard is a social sanction intending individual **conformity** with a belief system & communal intellectual **purity** (clarity of self-definition). Without theological standards, anything goes, with the result that soon everything goes, is gone: the community ceases. But if the standards are applied too stringently, with rigorism, liberty ceases. In Rankian terms, the former situation is the hypertrophication, the excessive development, of the urge to emerge: individual opinion is sacred, criticism is proscribed, & tolerance in action is elevated to relativism in theory. As for the latter situation, group-think is sacred, the urge to merge is overdeveloped, intellectual differing is condemned as dissidence, & in the absence of internal self-criticism the group drifts away from reality (the normal abnormal fate of cults, whose leaders' egos experience megalomaniacal-demonic-fatal expansion, instance the Rev. Jones of Jonestown, Guyana).

A closer look at Rank's psychiatry may help us to avoid these two pathologies & to exercise **wisdom** in the framing & functioning of theological standards.

1 "It is just as unbearable to be God [overcome by the urge to emerge] as it is to remain an utter slave [overwhelmed by the urge to merge]" (Otto Rank, BEYOND PSYCHOLOGY [Dover/41/58], p.196). Notice how the biblical paradigm delivers us from the temptations of the extremes: our common tasks (in which we merge with nature & society) are illumined by cosmic heroism (by which we emerge as each one a servant-child of God). As Luther put it in THE LIBERTY OF THE CHRISTIAN MAN, "a slave of no man but servant of all." Theological standards should be framed, & should function, so as to honor this medial location of the Christian as under-God-in-society.

In the context, Rank provides this ontological grounding for his observation: "There exists a division between one's spiritual and purely human needs, and...the satisfaction and fulfillment for each has to be found in different spheres." If "one person is made the godlike judge over good and bad in the other person,....such symbiotic relationship becomes demoralizing to both parties." (A world-historical instance of this demoralization was Stalin's USSR, what I might call universal gulagization. And at least for adding race ideology, Hitler's Europe was worse.)

We Christians must **think for ourselves**, else we're not living under God; & we must **"be of one mind"** (Phil.2.2), else we are not Christians. This is the ineluctable intellectual tension in which we are to live. This being so, living in this tension is itself a theological standard. Each church must decide for itself the limits of elasticity. A fundamentalist church has severe limits, a liberal church wide limits. But to have no limits is not to be a church at all but only a social club. When churches permit, even encourage, joining for nonspiritual reasons (in Rank's meaning of "spiritual," above; eg, for social reasons, or because of social concerns), their implicit contracts with these new members disqualify these churches to continue as churches. They may continue the words, but the music fades off into forgetfulness (2Ti.3.5).

2 Let's call theocentric living in the tension, **theism**. We can sharpen our understanding of it by considering two aberration from it....(1) The **romantic** collapse, or other-idolatry. Here another person, or a cause, is the love-object & bogusly incarnates the other, the spiritual, dimension into a "cosmology of two" (BP, p.168), doomed to IFD disease (from over-idealism to inevitable frustration to disintegration of the relationship, discouragement-disillusionment-despair [of which Kierkegaard remains the master expositor])....(2) The **narcissistic** collapse

is the romantic idolatry hitting bottom in a second collapse, this time into the individual, ego isolato whose solipsism makes the idea of "standards" unthinkable....The two idolatries merge into virulent nationalisms, tribalism, group-empiricism supported by special pleadings ("men's experience," "women's experience," "black experience," as epistemological base for ideological claims). These all develop their own esprit & standards confronting traditional standards with their own hermeneutics. Resulting fragmentations are good or bad depending on your point of view. Religions are rejected where they do not support the surge & are sharpened up for the fight as auxiliary weapons ("fighting over religion" being more appearance than reality)....I'm not rejecting as sick these emergent group-claims. Each one has some consciousness-raising values. What I am condemning is the romantic-narcissistic idolatrous hubris in these many "experience" claims, a hubris alienating (1) from God & (2) from nonparticipants in the group & thus (3) from traditional theological standards.

3 A double propensity of the **individual** is the will to dis/believe--to merge by believing, to emerge by doubting-disbelieving. Individualism as the psychic form of our culture's prevailing narcissism favors the will to disbelieve. To it the whole notion of theological standards is alien, even repulsive, certainly oppressive-passé-useless-unworkable. Rank (d.1939) would have objected that this stance is irresponsible: it assigns dominance to the adolescent desire-feeling of independence over both intellect & responsible willing. We can, he said (as Wm. James had said in the generation before him & Will Herberg was to say in the generation after him) will to believe (M.9.24). But is not the will to believe irrational? No more than the will to disbelieve. Disbelief may root in sophistication, an intellectual virtue; belief roots in simplicity, a spiritual virtue. A candidate's formation in our secular civilization has almost certainly included more of the former than of the latter. The imbalance can be corrected by self-re-formation in spiritual simplicity, in childlikeness in the presence of God & of the past, which to the simple soul is prolog (as Homer to the Greeks, Vergil to the Romans, the Bible to Jews & Christians).

The underlying premise here, as in all efforts to persuade-convert (the prophets, Jesus, the apostles), is that a human being can will-effect self-change. Rank came to reject Freud's analogizing from physical to psychological. That old thought-process suppressed the personal-volitional under the impersonal-instinctual. The ego is not (my figure) a ping-pong ball between the id (the instinctual) & the superego (society-imposed conscience). "I understand by will a positive guiding organization and integration of self which utilizes creatively, as well as inhibits and controls, the instinctual drives" (WILL THERAPY AND TRUTH AND REALITY [Knopf/50], pp.111-2). The neurotic goes to the extreme of merging (becoming overly conforming, as a Christian who sacrifices intellectual integrity to theological standards) or emerging (as the Jas. Dean film, "Rebel Without a Cause"). Both neurotics need help to achieve creative individuation. (It's not rare for an examination committee to come upon a candidate who needs this help.)

4 Now use the title of this Thinksheet as an analytic to look at your **life-story**. Which side of the balance, if either, have you put more weight on? If your predominant style has been compliance, theological standards have probably been no problem. If contrariness, probably a problem. I've been more the latter, but with so strong a conservative streak that my style has been a drive for balance.

STORY: More than  $\frac{1}{2}$  c. ago (to be specific, my diary says 1 Jan 43) the chair of a seminary's faculty committee offered me the chair of the theology department if I would "settle down," become less adversarial ("controversial"), less inclined to bespeak facts/viewpoints/truths being left out that I believed important to be let in. I had to disappoint him. "I made clear to him my distinction between form (method of religious-theological thought and expression) and meaning (religious & theological content) & stated my critical-liberal position on the former & my appreciative-conservative position on the latter." I declined: it "would mean intellectual death. The will of the Lord be done. I am determined only that I shall not be governed by personal considerations." People can change, yes; but I have not changed my theological style/stance/substance. And the fact that I could never "fit in" well has not been too high a price to pay for it.