

# THE COURAGE TO GO BEYOND Z

\* Beheaded by Emperor Claudius  
in AD 270 for having  
the courage to go beyond Z.

2536 Valentine's '92

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In the mixed-feelings process of throwing out yards of files, I'm coming across not too many things I can't part with. Imagine my chutzpa in thinking there might be anything there to interest you! But here's something from 20 years & 6 days ago, my letter to Bill Stringfellow & Tony Towne, who were living on Block Island, & inviting the likes of escaped-criminal Dan Berrigan to hide out with them, & radical but non-criminal me to visit them. In justification of his behavior, Bill had written "Jesus as Criminal" (in the genre of the then-popular "The Student as Nigger"). Jesus & Dan & Bill & Tony had gone **beyond** the law--as had our son Mark.

The law is intended to order civil society "from A to Z," as we say. But its sanctions, its teeth, are designed to keep citizens within A-Z. More for the latter than the former reason, religious experiencing (the experiencing of the Beyond & the More Than) & law are awkward in each other's presence, each suspicious of the other. (To the extent that religion does not experience this uneasiness, it is not religious.)

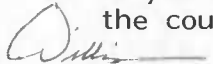
Even if you quit reading this Thinksheet with this paragraph, my McGuffey's A-Z Reader lesson, wholly taught in this Thinksheet's title, will bless you. But you may opt to stick with me. If so, here's my letter:

Dear Bill and Tony:....¶ Monday our son Mark goes to trial for refusing to register for the draft [though he appeared before his draft board and gave the required information, then refused to sign]--on the ground that no tribe has the right to seize its young to kill the young of another tribe. (He's been working on the Harrisburg trial, as have some of my students.)....¶ Naturally, I've been reading lately in this area of our pain and pride. Your SUSPECT TENDERNESS was more than a comfort. "Jesus as Criminal" reminded me of my conversion to Christianity at age sixteen--drawn to this Outside Insider....¶ I seldom do a limerick, but this is what came of my reading your "Jesus as Criminal":

There once was a preacher named Kee  
who thought him conformity-free.

He doffed his sacrality  
yet lacked criminality--

the courage to go beyond Z.

Grace & peace, 

1 The middle lines panned the preachers who were talking a good line but refusing to lay it (their body) on the line. They "doffed their sacrality" & played the game of "more secular than thou" (& loved Harvey Cox's sophomoric "The Secular City"), but would not cross the line of custom, to say nothing of law, to demonstrate against our senseless slaughter of a million Vietnamese (at a loss, it turned out, of a mere 58,000 of us--"mere" only in numerical comparison--& a sick, continuing-to-the-present search for MIAs).

2 Courage/timidity is one thing, another is wisdom/folly. Of the four, only timidity won't go beyond Z. Sometimes it takes wisdom to know one should *not* go beyond Z, + the courage to quit, which our presidents didn't have in Vietnam. Within days of the above letter, I'd written Pres. Nixon that "We have exhausted good reasons for our military presence in SE Asia, if we ever had any. Please have the wisdom and courage to withdraw." But folly, the folly of going beyond Z, persisted for agonizing months & even years more....Vietnam is the American Auschwitz: we are as loath to face it as the Germans are to face shoa-holocaust. And we continue to suffer for it, as--as I write--presidential candidate Bill Clinton is suffering in N.H. The question of criminality seemed so clear in the Gulf War, & so muddy in Vietnam.

# As for being conformity-free, what an illusion! Among the comics, I love "Hagar the Horrible" & "Calvin [and Hobbes]" because they are truly CF (conformity-free). Ah, but in real life, it's tough, even when it's God's will.