

ON (NOT) BEING A PRIEST TO YOURSELF

Priests

are mediators between God and humanity--that's a minimum of 3. The 3 can be either (1) God/**priest**/nonpriest, the literal situation, or (2) God/**priest/priest**, the rhetorical-Protestant principle of "the priesthood of all believers" (in the 1:1 form, Carlyle Marney's influential book **PRIESTS TO EACH OTHER**). This Thinksheet attacks a current nonsensical extension of the priest idea, namely, being a priest to yourself. The extended, social form of this sacerdotal numero uno is the sacred duo, ie, hieratic interpersonalism, being "priests" to each other as in Marney but, unlike Marney, leaving God out.

1. There you've got it, the essence of this human-potential, New Age priestcraft in both its forms (hyperpersonal & hyperinterpersonal): **leaving God out**. When God's left out, what's left to love? "**Nature**," so various forms of nature priestcraft, both prosaic & poetic, are now alive among us (eg, wicca [witchcraft], neoDruidism, the avant gardists of the HUDSON REVIEW, astrology [in and outside the White House & the Beltway], the everyday media use of "Mother Nature," goddess worship on the feminist left). God/nature/humanity: if you're centered but neither theocentric nor physiocentric, you're anthropocentric: **humanity** is your thing, your sacred thing, your numen, fons et origo of your numinous experiencing.

2. This anthropolatry, humanity-worship, psychiatrists (following Freud) call **narcissism**, with (according to orthodox psychoanalysts) masturbation as its symbolo-physical expression. Since masturbation plays a greater part in homo- than in heterosexuality, one would surmise (rightly) that homosexuals are disproportionately represented as producers of outstanding works of narcissistic art. Take, eg, Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," which for our purpose has the additional advantage of stranding the two godless worships, viz, of nature & of humanity. (My reff. are to the strophes.) 20: "Why should I pray?....I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones....To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,/All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means./I know I am deathless....I know I am august...I exist as I am, that is enough,/If no other in the world be aware I sit content....One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself." (How "natural" for the mystical-naturalistic narcissist to take on the attributes of divinity!) 1 (first line): "I celebrate myself, and sing myself....Creeds and schools in abeyance....I harbor for good or bad,/...Nature without check with original energy." 3: "while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire myself."

3. Which brings us to **the Olympics**, now on as I write--accoutred with global rituals celebrating the athletic potential of the human body. While I hate the godlessness, I love the indirect honoring of the Creator, the magnificent bodies in action toward perfection. And I am ashamed that the only gross, anarchic behavior in the opening ceremonies was that of my own country's athletes. Said an official, "The Americans do not care about others. They were just eager to show themselves on NBC" (in yesterday's press report from Seoul). Walt Whitman, indeed: individualistic narcissism is inherently chaotic, anarchic. No better analysis of this than I'm aware of than in Matthew Arnold's **CULTURE AND ANARCHY** (1869), in which his definitions of Barbarians & Philistines are set over against our culture's creative stranding of Hebraism & Hellenism. Why were our U.S. athletes, supposed to be good sports, bad sports? The tube, said the official, **videonarcissism**. Francis Bacon implied that reading created the modern individual: has the tube, substitute & replacement for reading, created the hyperindividual? "A Pooped Parent in Michigan," in today's "Ann Landers," says "Our kids are living in a sick society that loves violence and greed and demands instant gratification." How did they get that way? "Steamy sex on TV and in the movies, commercials that glorify sensuality, and the barnyard behavior of stars and athletes whom our kids idolize."

4. This chaotic-anarchic hyperindividualism revalorizes traditional religious terms (in this Thinksheet, "priest"), recentring them on **self**. Drugs, including alcohol, would not be so serious a crisis in our society were it not for the three fates that follow this mentality, viz, anomie, accidie, and apathy. Congress just concluded the crisis is so serious it's necessary to execute drug killers. I'm for that; but the only cure for a good high is a better high, which cannot be provided within the limits of the narcissistic mindset.

5. **Carl Jung** and his student **Jos. Campbell** are the primary priests (a metaphorical use of the word) in this transformation of religious language. Both give Whitmanish narcissism an intellectual status Whitman was incapable of, and uninterested in, giving it. Both spook up their doctrines, giving them a numinous aura--thus my term, as this Thinksheet's supertitle, "hieratic narcissism." In background, the first was Protestant and the second, Catholic; but neither practiced any religion, both were do-it-yourself priests to themselves. The archetypes of the first and the myths of the second were the residences of the sacred, and for both the residence of the holy was the human soul.

6. Why this Thinksheet? Because of Wes Jackson's keynote address day before yesterday at the New Alchemy Inst. Harvest Festival (E. Falmouth, MA) and my conversation with him after he received the annual ecology-hero award (received last year by Helen Nearing & the year prior by Wendell Berry: great carers for the earth). [NE is the mecca of theory--practice institutions combining ecology & economics; another is Land Inst., Salina, KS, founded by Wes Jackson; NA, 1969; LI, 1972.] (Among WJ's sources: Weisner's EXODUS & REVOLUTION and Bailey's THE HOLY EARTH. His own works: MAN AND THE ENVIRONMENT, NEW ROOTS FOR AGRICULTURE, MEETING THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE LAND, and ALTARS OF UNHEWN STONE.) The speaker gave more ecological and American-historical credit to Scripture and Church than any other eco-prophet of national repute I've ever heard or read, and he may well be an actual (ie, believing-and-practicing) Christian. But note: "We are the secular inheritors of two traditions in the West, the prophetic and the royal." No indication in his speech that he might be also a religious inheritor; so I said to him, "Why did you not acknowledge that some of us, in addition to being secular inheritors, are also religious inheritors?" WJ: "I meant 'at the minimum.'" I: "Then why didn't you say 'at the minimum'?" His wording was we (secularists) vs. they (theists), and of course he made no reference to God [on which see #2256, "Scrupulous Godlessness"]. Note further the secularistic verbal twisting this Thinksheet is attacking: said he, Moses (rep. of the prophetic tradition; actually, he was of both), after 40 wilderness years "getting rid of the slave mentality," led the people to Canaan, the dream-land where you could have your own figtree (leisure), your own vineyard (labor & contemplation), and your own religion ("**be your own priest**"). "That's where the Jefferson dream was born....Where there is no vision ["food is a derivative of vision"], the people perish."....Except for his nonsense about masturbatory priestcraft, I was wholly with him. We need "a science of earth stewardship" and must "change people's perception of what's possible"--what Bucky Fuller calls "a comprehensive anticipatory design." We can't "rope off the wilderness and make it a saint": "either the whole damn thing is holy or it ain't!" (In his excellent one-hour lecture, the only point at which there was applause.) Quoting Jesus without referring to him, WJ said would should extend to nature, to the whole earth, the phrase "unto the least of these, my brethren" (but he did not complete the extension: being nature advocates is doing something for Jesus, "unto me"). It's no accident that St. Francis is the saint of nature: he was married to poverty (this being, & only by implication, WJ's one reference to the biospheric need for the simplification of life). The eco-goal is restoring the planet to ecological health. His lecture title: "The Good News Is...Successes on the Pathway to an Ecological Future." Reverse the Cartesian-Baconian paradigm, which teaches the priority of the part over the whole, a reduction that is reducing our bio-home to ruins. Now we must elevate nature's wisdom above human cleverness: "There's more to be discovered than invented, and our future will depend more on the former."