

"Where's your head at?" was a common expression among alienated American youth in the 1960s. I was reminded of it when I saw the current Sony camcorder two-page ad: p.1, a small mouse; p.2, a huge cat seeming to be looking into the camcorder, but of course aware only of the mouse! Displaced message: you, dear reader, are to treat cat & mouse as throwaways so you can be aware of, pay deliberate-decisive attention to, the sales item. (Mad. Av. doesn't get more clever than this.)

For the Church, the camcorder is Christ, whose "mind" is to center our minds as Christians & as members of the local church, the church local (all Christians in a geographical area), the larger church, & the Church at large. Craigville Theological IX responded to Christ's question, "Who do YOU say I am?" You both individual & collective, not other people. This year's follow-up Colloquy might be titled *What do YOU say I think? And what is YOUR mind--you personally & you in the UCC--in the light, & under the judgment, of my mind?* The Colloquy title:

"THEOLOGICAL STANDARDS FOR MINISTRY IN THE UCC"

1 "Theological" is intellectual, mental, of the **mind**. By the Stoic analogy from individual to group (a favorite of Paul's, eg Ro.12 & 1Cor.12, + extensive use in the cosmic Christianity of Col. & Eph.), "ecclesiological" is of the communal **body**; & "spiritual" is esprit de corps, the common **spirit** of a group. What, then, is the meaning of "mind" in Paul's assertion that we have "the mind of Christ"? Analogically, it's Christian groupthink; but christologically it's the real intellectual presence of the Lord in & among Christians. Equally complex & rich, & on the same model, is "the spirit/Spirit of Christ."

2 In its religious-moral-ethical-intellectual paradigm, Christianity strands together two earlier paradigms, the Hebraic & the Hellenic (esp. Stoic). Both had a keen sense of what's un/fitting, in/appropriate, a sense of **standards** (defined in 2593.2). Churches can err, often have erred, in being either too tight (rigorist) or too loose (latitudinarian) vis-a-vis intellectual standards, which function positively to assert what must not be left out & negatively to proscribe what must not be let in. (Shorthand for the two: "orthodoxy" & "heresy.") The former prescribes the rules & rights of the game, & the latter lets you know when you're playing a different game: it's when you keep playing, & think you're playing the same game, but haven't noticed that you're out of the ballpark.

3 So far it sounds simple, straightforward, especially with that sports analogy. But theologically, what we get when the foul lines are rigidly laid down with chalk is not the mind of Christ but the Grand Inquisitor. But at the opposite extreme, to reject or trivialize theological standards is like playing tennis with neither net nor chalklines--which, of course, is not playing tennis at all, no matter how much the players insist it is.

3 Three characteristics of the American mind--individualism, libertarianism, & anti-intellectualism--are powerful in the UCC mind. Each is suspicious of the concept of theological standards, & together they are a hostile three-musketeers corps challenging the very idea of a Colloquy on "Theological Standards in the UCC." But the standards are there, clearly stated in our founding documents. And the Colloquy will remind of the standards (as an amnesia cure) & "strengthen your weak knees" (Heb.12.12 NRSV) for more vigorous-refreshing theological walking. FACT: Theological laxity turns a church into a club. NEED: More courage, in members of church & ministry committees & of pastoral relations committees, to say both yes (these theological standards must be met) & no (to violations/violators of theological standards).

4 This Colloquy is about a church's mind, the UCC mind. Like a person, a church has a body (its membership), a spirit (its inner self-conscious life vis-a-vis God, other churches & religions, & the world), & a mind (its **central core of**

convictions about God-self-church-society-humanity-nature-future). "Central core" is a double metaphor: a circle has a static center, an apple has a dynamic core. "The mind of Christ" is, in the NT & subsequent Christian history, both unchanging (& in this, a center) & growing (like a fruit-core).

5 Paul's claim that Christians "have the mind of Christ" seems, at first sight, audacious almost to the edge of blasphemy. But the context puts him in the church politics of knownothingism (vs.2: "except Jesus Christ, and him crucified") over against those Corinthians & both visitors & opponents of them who claimed a wisdom superior to the apostle's. Made as simple as I can make it, his philosophical argument is (1) only likes can know likes, (2) so only God knows God & (3) only humans know humans; but (3) God chose to present himself to us in Jesus, (4) in whose Spirit God inhabits us, so (5) we have within us--as a gift, not a human achievement--a divine-human conversation in which we are (vs.13) "taught by the Spirit [of God], interpreting spiritual things to those who [because they too have received the gift of the Spirit] are spiritual." Within the sphere of this argument, the claim to "have the mind of Christ" must be seen not as put-down boasting but as gift-receiving-&-giving humble & courageous obedience to the prophetic vocation.

Illustration & reinforcement of the **gift** mentality: "Across the very cultural and social chasms that careful social class analysis opens up between us and the biblical world, we establish a bond with those ancients: we, no less than they, are fragile social creatures, not as much in control as we sometimes fancy but much more graced with possibilities for personal and social transformation than we often dare accept. What begins as fate becomes ultimately a gift." I trembled with thanks to God when I read this the last sentence in a manuscript Norman Gottwald sent me, his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature (to appear in the next issue of the JOURNAL OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE). 1946-9 he was my teaching assistant in Hebrew & Greek; we were gifts to each other, recipients of the grace-gifts of God, each in his own way trying to communicate "the mind of Christ."