HOW TO THINK AS A "THEOLOGICAL STANDARD"

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ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone 508.775.8008
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Craigville Theological Colloquy X.6

A "standard" is, etymologically, an identity-&-power-giving center & rallying-point. Our soldiers (the metaphor is military) before the battle know, from flag-or-guidon recognition, **who** we are: the high-carried unit marker signals us against (or at least over against, in distinction from) them. We are always the same no matter **where** we are: standards are dynamic, movable. (Rigid theologies have monuments, not standards.) Further, where our standard is, there is our stake, our claim: (1) When Columbus thrust his standard into a Caribbean beach, the Western hemisphere became Christian (belonging to the Roman Catholic Church) & Spanish (belonging to Spain); (2) Iwo Jima became ours, the four-men-&-the-flag memorial reminds us, when we struck our flag into Mt. Suribachi 23 Feb 45; & (3) The moon became a U.S. protectorate (!) when the Eagle landed & a U.S. flag was stuck into moondust. Finally, standards keep feeding back to us the existential knowledge of **whose** we are.

Tote this all up & it's no wonder that people have died, & continue to die as well as live, for standards. Without standards, "we" aren't we, we don't know where or whose we are; & "they" do not exist. "You" don't exist either when "I" don't know who-where-whose I am. No offense: except theoretically (See "solipsism."), I can't exit without you--maybe not you you, but some you.

Now, a military standard has a **form**. Nobody'd take it to be a tree or a rock; we know what it is even if we can't see its **content**, it's identity-giving details. But it has also a complex **meaning** embracing what & how to think & feel & what to do. That's five things. "Theological standards" usually means only what to think. This Thinksheet defends the claim that how to think is, as truly as what to think, a theological standard--the lesser one only in the sense of the one less attended to.

1 "How" includes both mode & mood. Let's take **mood** first--from which mode is functionally inseparable, as the former exercises selective-formative-stylistic influences on the latter. If here we take, as I think we should, the NT as normative (ie, standard), here's how Christians are to do their theology:

boldly....Jesus' parables are invitations to bold, even radical, theologizing about how things are & what God wants-demands & how things will be in the light of how we decide-act in response to this parabolic teaching. Some of his sayings have this same explosive-implosive effect. And the Jesus Event leads his disciples-apostles-followers to continue this boldness(eg, Paul on Israel's role freshly viewed [Ro.9-11] & on the traditional doctrine of resurrection in the light of Jesus' [1Cor.15]).

Not surprising that the NT has ten words for this mood. Jesus' movement was in the Hebrew prophetic tradition, his followers were emboldened by their experiences-conviction of his resurrection, & boldness is a characteristic of all high-energy new social movements. Of the ten NT Gk. words of this force, the most used stem (in two wds.) means "all-speech" (thus, inwardly unhindered speech, uncensored by self-protective considerations, confident, fearless, free),

13 appear in Ac., which stresses the forthrightness of apostolic preaching. Eg, 4.29-31: "Lord, help your servants proclaim your message with all boldness [an intensive, since "all" is in the prefix of the Gk. here for "boldness"]....[The apostles] began to proclaim the word boldly."

As this summer (July 19-23) we're holding the Xth Craigville Theological Colloquy, in preparation we're reexamining the Witness Statements of Colloquies I-IX. What were those Colloquies' moods in their doing of theology? Well, there was some boldness, as in accomodating the communing of unconfirmed children & the baptizing of dead infants (closer to unanimity on the former than on the latter).

modestly....Contradiction? How can you be both bold & modest? But both truly are of the NT mood & spirit.

At interrogation of candidates for ordination, commissioning, or installation I've the deserved reputation of asking devastating questions. It's a matter of conviction with me. I believe all candidates need to be devastated, humiliated by intellectual unanswerables & humbled by spiritual mysteries. Such questions are ministers of modesty. But they are also tests of boldness, without which true Christian leadership is impossible. Which eventuates in this question: Does this candidate show creative tension & balance between boldness & modesty?

What's "modesty" in the NT? It's how a woman dresses, viz. for self-presentation as a Christian woman (to be seen) rather than as a spectacle (to be looked at): ITi.2.9, αιδ- *aid-*; by seguing to behavior as clothing, the writer further emphasizes Christian women's attire: "[dress themselves] with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God" (NRSV). This rich word includes both the fear of bringing God or self to disesteem-dishonor, anticipatory grief,&consequent restraint from unworthy appearance-feeling-thinking-behavior (= "shamefastness" [KJV 1611, in later edd. corrupted-downgraded-externalized into "shame*faced*ness"]). This modesty is habitual &, except for the occasional calculation of internal consequences of violation, unconscious: the limit-setting against hubris, overweening self-confidence, arrogance in one's claims (opinions, convictions), is, as we say, "natural," characteristic of the person. (Jesus & Paul speak "naturally" of what they do not know, but this doesn't compromise their boldness.) By contrast, "shame" (αισχυν-, *aisc^{h}un-*) calculates external negative consequences from the operation of the social sanction against hubris. "To sum up [the distinction], αἰδώς would always restrain a good man from an unworthy act, while αἰσχύνη might sometimes restrain a bad one" (65, R.C.Trench's classic SYNONYMS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT [1880; my c. is 1906]; 63-68 is a crystalline discussion of the NT's "modesty" words).

NRSV has "modesty" as the last word of 1Ti.2, to translate σωφροσύνη, a compound literally meaning "wholemindedness" (or "sound-" or "entire-"). It is the mood of a mind aware of the entire situation, all the relationships & factors, all the powers & limits. Theology done is this mood rings true!

And I can't resist mentioning one more reference giving the NT mood of "modesty," viz He.12.28: we're to serve God with modesty (NRSV "reverence") & awe. Some MSS have αἰδώς; the text behind NRSV has a synonym, εὐλαβεία, the attitude-mood of one who abides in the awareness of standing in the presence of God as both gracious & dangerous--grateful for grace & in the fearful knowledge that God is not to be messed with vis-a-vis issues of truth (& therefore words) & of love (& therefore of relationships). (Trench, 65: "carefulness not to offend" God.)

This mood of modesty cannot be sustained without continuous self-examination, introspection, such reflection as asks "Was I modest or only timid? Did my boldness break out of the limits of modesty & become arrogance?" The Greeks had a word for it, yes, the word transliterated into Eng. as "entropy" (!). Literally it's "turning inward" (Lat., "introversion"). People who've not been doing enough of it need to be shamed into doing more: 2Thes.3.14, 1Cor.6.5, 15.34, Tit.2.8.

Why have I not spoken of "humility" instead of, or in addition to, modesty? Because it's more a virtue (to be treated under ethics) than a mood (to be treated under psychology).

expectantly....The Holy Spirit strives to guide the modest-bold thinker "in-

to all the truth" (Jn.16.13; next v., "declaring" what's Christ's); & we should eagerly expect, faithfully hope for, this help. The passage boldly affirms that what the Spirit teaches is of the Father through the Son (vs.15, trinitarian).

intentionally....The steady mood of (NT, therefore) Christian thinking is alive with the intention to glorify God (as, in the next v., the Spirit glorifies Christ). At least for me, the locus classicus here is 1Cor.10.31 NRSV: "whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." In the context, Paul is allowing action options (what to think-decide-do) but no mood alternative intention.

lovingly....Yes, think boldly, modestly, expectantly. But love is the core mood of Christian thinking, as in the NT love has the fullest & richest motivational-sanctional force. How did God think toward us in sending the prophets & his Son? Lovingly. That's how we are to think toward God, one another, the neighbor, even the enemy. "Lovingkindness" (Heb., *hesed*) is at the heart of God's heart; so we are to think-speak-write-act with kindness, knowing that those on the receiving end of our sending are our fellow creatures, entitled to our respect because of their source in God, their limits in nature-history-society, their hurts, & their hopes. Of course kindness, lest it deteriorate into sentimentality, must share billing with truth. (On B'way I saw Paddy Cheyevsky's GIDEON, p.1 of PLAYBILL having this credo under the play's title: "I believe in kindness, and that old men and women should be kept cool in the summer and warm in the winter." Period. The play is kind to Gideon but not to truth's demands for more than kindness.) Always (Gal.5.6 NRSV), "the only thing that counts in faith working [fn. "made effective"] through love."

2 Yes, "how" to think includes both mood & **mode**, manner, logic (types, patterns, parameters of reasoning). Please look again at this Thinksheet's title: I'm concerned here with the "standard," normative, biblical (OT-NT) ways of thinking. Candidates for official church ministry should be expected to think normally & normatively in these ways, though the more sophisticated they are the more they'll be aware of competing postbiblical & nonbiblical thought-modes (as biblical studies make them aware of alternative modes competing with biblical thought-ways in biblical times).

Now, as they pop into my mind (& not necessarily in order of importance), are most if not all of the types of what we may call NT logic (understanding that much of it derives from the OT and encounters with Jews both within & outside of the churches). The other main element in early Christian logic came indirectly through Hellenistic (Greek-influenced) Judaism & directly through early Christians' encounters with "Greeks" (a variety of Greek-speaking, Greek-thinking nonJews).

dominical (the adj. for "the Lord" Jesus)....Jesus' mode of thinking was theocentric (God-centered), the early Christians' was christocentric (centered in & on Jesus). At the Third Gospel's end (L.24.44 NRSV), the resurrected Lord says "everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms [ie, in TANAKH, the three sections of the Hebrew Bible] must be fulfilled." Adds Luke, "then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures." If you are a Jew, you won't find ("understand") anything about Jesus in the OT, though you'll see some OT in Jesus. If you are a Christian scholar, you will as scholar agree with the Jews (Christian biblical scholarship itself, independent of Jewish scholarship, making that agreement unavoidable). But as a Christian you will "see no one except Jesus himself alone" (Mt.17.8 NRSV: in the transfiguration, Moses [the primary Torah] & Elijah [the prototypic prophet] have disappered). Stephen's sanhedrin sermon (Ac.7.1-53) is, we suppose, typical of early Jewish-Christian preaching, the whole flow of OT-Jewish history finding its denouement in the appearance, death (, resurrection, return) of "the Righteous One," who suffered the fate of "the prophets" before him. That sermon was an apologia, a defense, free to cruise sequentially through the OT. In the next chapter, the Christian cooptation of the OT begins in the middle (Is.53.7-8, p.648 of Kittel's BIBLIA HEBRAICA, p.717 being the precise middle) & expands to include the whole:

"starting with this scripture, [Philip] proclaimed to [an Ethiopian court official] the good news about Jesus."

But some candidates have great trouble thinking dominically. They've grown up in a school-&-media culture in which it's easier to say "I have my doubts" than to say "I believe." They've come to doubt those doubts strongly enough to become candidates for ecclesial office, but they haven't come to believe the normative Christian beliefs strongly enough so that dominical thought is normal for them. Atop that, many have been trained in theological seminaries that have abandoned "OT" (as supposedly insulting to Judaism) & substituted "HB" (Hebrew Bible) or, just recently, ET (the Earlier Testament). As a biblical scholar, for more than a half centiry I've strongly promoted both radical-critical-historical (first-storey) scholarship & the devotional-dominical (second-storey) reading, "understanding," of the Bible. The second storey was the only one the early Christians had: theirs was a single-storey hermeneutic, & it was the Christian "standard" on how to read the Bible. Now, with the more light God has given us, the norm must be two-storey. But what's to be done with the candidate for whom there's only a single story, viz Enlightenment critical exegesis? How say, helpfully, "Come back when you have learned how to think dominically, by a spiritual formation cooperative with your intellectual formation"? One year, I think, is sufficient to give candidates to repair any standards deficiences. If a church-&-ministry committee is unwilling to apply such discipline, why should the committee exist?

narrational....What propositions were to the Greek philosophers, stories were to the Jews. While we Christians strand the two together, our primary mode of thinking as Christians is Jewish: we tell & interpret stories, basically the biblical ones, which together amount to the Story of God's dealings with the world, history, & us with our contemporaries. As is our faith, our way of thinking is historical, & the Bible is its primary source & model. A Christian turned Buddhist wrote me that he was "happy to say good-bye to the burdens of history." That would not have been an option for him had he remained Christian. Marcion (ca.AD/CE 140) tried to remain Christian while rejecting the OT (as later did the Nazis), but his thus impoverished church soon died out. Everest gets climbed because it's there, & the Bible stories get used by those who think Christianly because they're there. One may not like all the details & the possible inferences from the Eden story (Gn.2.4-3), but it's there; & the candidate's question must not be whether to think of it, but how. Likewise, the virgin birth of Jesus (in the birth narratives of Mt. & L.), which is historical at least in the sense that it's part of our Christian (his)tory: the question "What good is it?" is not cynical but explorative. Jewish martyrologies became a mold for the Christian understanding of Jesus' crucifixion, & the earliest postbiblical Christian histories were martyrologies. Plutarch's LIVES preached the Greek & Roman virtues by biographies, & Jas. Wm. McClendon Jr. wrote a seminal work on BIOGRAPHY AS THEOLOGY (repub. by TPI/93). A Christian who's learned how to think narrationally can pray the newspaper (which is primarily stories) instead of only reading it. And that skill is a theological standard...."Providential" is another name for this style of thinking. History's in the hands of God, not (to use a metaphor for fate) in the lap of the gods.

concatenic (chain-like)....Christian thinking links God to all & all to God & all to all. As this PEANUTS cartoon shows, it's not easy. Rus. Hoban's

RIDDLEY WALKER, which my #1600 reviewed under "Sense-Making," hilariously details the predicament of a slow-witted religious leader who dynastically succeeds his fast-witted father. It's a riddle to the PEANUTS grampa that buying a new car failed to fight off the flu: he failed to concatenate, to chain-link, into the future. Riddley got his name because he was so poor at connection-making, at linking with the past & in the present, that people said with a sigh, "It's all riddles to him." He believed that the world was constructed, integrated, but he couldn't evidence it enough to support his own & his people's faith. He had the faith-commitment to concatenate, but lacked the imagination, & finally--after persistent botching--lost the courage to continue to try.

As a **model** of commitment-imagination-courage in Christian concatenic thinking, ponder 1Cor.10.31-11.16. How is the Christian to think-link? So as to glorify God (10.31; it's another way to put the theme petition of the Lord's Prayer). As is the universe, Christian life is to be theocentric, so that's how Christians are to think in general but also in particular (2Cor.10.5 NRSV: "We take every thought captive to obey Christ"; NEB-REB: "We compel every human thought to surrender in obedience to Christ")....In our passage, for cultural reasons we can't recover, Paul is concatenizing support for his instruction that at least in public worship, men are to be bareheaded & women veiled. Excluding the Pastorals as deuteropauline (in the Paul tradition but later than Paul), it's clear that women were not inferiors as leaders in Paul's churches, that in Christ the sexes are equal (Gal.3.28), & that mutuality is to characterize Christian marriage. All this is Paul's core. To support what he's saying about head-covering, he links (historical) tradition, (contemporary-local) custom, & nature. What's astonishing, for that time & place, is that in Christian leadership he does not subordinate women to men. In Paul's chain of thought here, some links are stronger than others. The strongest linkages are the direct use of the dominical sanction (female/male interdependence "in the Lord," 11.11) & of the divine sanction ("all things come from God" [11.12], so the rib story & the birth canal balance each other: again, equality). Broadly, all the chains link back to the Center (as, to change the figure, the edges of each petal of a flower), the overall Gestalt being concatenic variations (well displayed in the Letter "To the Hebrews").

metaphorical....The metaphorical mode of thinking is a third Christian standard. Light ("enlightenment"="buddhahood") is Buddhism's dominant metaphor, & it's prominent in our faith: "I am the light of the world" (Jn.8.12; 9.5; cp.chap. 1). Certain ancient Christian communities may have been defined by certain metaphors (Norman R. Petersen, THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF LIGHT, TPI/93). Light is the dominant metaphor in the Gospel of Thomas, which may be earlier than the Gospel of John. ...Whatever the metaphor, Christian meditation uses it for centering, as an intentional-attentional window on God. The antechamber to this as a mode of thinking is this devotional praxis at which most candidates in liberal churches are inexperienced. The metaphorical mode of thinking is a "theological standard" that cannot be met & maintained without regular devotional use of the Faith's ruling metaphors.

dialectical....Christian thinking isn't logical, it's dialogical. In his atheist articles in PARADE, Carl Sagan is logical: he thinks as the media & the schools have taught Americans to think, leaving God out. As I write, David Koresh (Branch Davidians, Waco TX) is not leaving God out. He's using his 9th-grade education + self-teaching to dope out what God is doing & what he should do as he vacillates between wanting apocalyptic-redemptive martyrdom & waiting for a message from on high. He's an extreme (pathological?) case of the dialectic inherent in Christian (& Jewish) thought: all depends on God/us. God is sovereign (directing Moses but [Ro.9.18 NRSV] "hardening the heart of whomever he chooses"), but we are responsible, respond-able, able to respond to God's gracious invitation (vs.13 of next chap.: "'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"). Wesley's bon mot: "On your knees, for everything depends on God: on your feet, for everything depends on you." Standard Christian thinking never tries to evade this paradox, for in its clarity & mystery we live.

inductive/deductive....Hunger for God's truth is both hunger for God & hunger for truth. While we know more of God's heart than mind, we're eager to "think God's thoughts after him" in science & the humanities. Our biblical heritage looks inductively at the world in the light of God (the "wisdom" tradition) & deductively at humanity in the light of God (the "prophecy" tradition). We have a taste for taste, but a hunger for truth. Not surprising that science has seen its greatest flourishing in the West....What's the theological standard in this dual mode of thinking? It comes clear when we ask what happens to truth & the pursuit thereof if we surrender either pole of the dialectic. Surrender the former & one descends into the darkness of dogma & ideology; the latter, materialism. Surrender both & theology is only a category of mythology (as Jos. Campbell, for whom religions are nothing but misunderstood mythologies) & we're back to Averroes' 12th-c. tragic faith/reason split--with tolerance (pluralism, multiculturalism) the only cultural hope, truth being unavailable to faith, a belief abetting "the indiscriminate inclusiveness of popular culture" (Chris. L. Chase, "Who Is Jesus Christ for Us Today? Popular Culture and Christian Belief," unpub. Craigville Theol. Colloquy IX paper, p.7). Countering this dilettante-despairing philosophy, Mortimer Adler has preached for 60 years the logic of truth (correspondence to reality, coherence, noncontradiction)--most simply, in his TRUTH IN RELIGION (Mac/90). I can still hear him in class, after these 52 years, railing against process theology (then called naturalistic theism) as a bastard from the illicit intercourse of religious faith & "scientific" positivism.

existential....How to think Christianly entails passive & active social location. Passive: One is "thrown down" (Heidegger) into three specificities--geography, time, & relative position in society. (In his Society of Biblical Literature presidential address, "Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies" [unpub., p.33], Norman Gottwald states the premise of his life-work as a biblical scholar: "Our analysis of a text is never complete until we pose questions about [the] social class [of authors-editors-redactors, "through various social contexts" vis-a-vis "the mode of production"].") Active: Where now, by personal choice, is a particular Christian thinker engaged in issues & situations affecting (directly) needy human beings & (indirectly) the economic-social-political conditions of human life? Without such involvement, one's Christianity is only a gnosticism & thus not Christianity at all.

parabolic/allegorical.*...Jesus' parabolic mode of thought is a theological standard for us Christians. What was is a mine for what is; what is below opens up to what is above; & what is now comes under the judgment of what should & will be. You can practice this mode while reading a newspaper (not with nonprint media, where somebody else is in control of the time)....If you move inside a parable & look around, you'll make an allegory of it. In the Gospels, the only extended example of this is Mt.13.18-23 M.4.13-20 L.8.11-15 (parable of the sower). A startling instance in Paul is the traveling rock (1Cor.10.4; this chapter allegorizes Ex.13-17)....This leads me to the next thinking-mode:

talmudic....The truth is approached by all explorations toward it. If you have a Dutch-neat mind, you'll have to work hard to think messy, to muck around with, to mull over all possibilities. As Paul is doing in Ro.9-11, trying to dope out, make the best sense of, the fact that Jews, instead of joining the Jesus movement en masse, developed increasing resistance to it. In regaling you with a tale of how everything that could go wrong with a restaurant order did, the Jewish standup comedian is being, in the lightest possible vein, talmudic. The weakness of this thought-mode among us explains why we Christians don't have quite as much fun arguing as Jews do. (Tragically, unnecessarily, this inferiority is a root of anti-semitism.)

conservative...."Gather up the fragments so nothing will be lost" (Jn.6.12, a Jesus command not found in the three Synoptic parallels). Sing what you've an intellectual block against saying (the successful suggestion of roommate Kirsopp Lake to Wm. Temple, this century's most eminent Abp. of Canterbury, when the later had been refused ordination on first try; I heard K.L. soberly tell the story). "Not one stroke of a letter" (Mt.5.18 NRSV).

*In this mode, words blend, become interchangeable. Eg, in the Gospel of Thomas, "Jesus," "light," "kingdom of God." At this advanced stage of the mode, the allegorial easily merges into the mystical, meditation into contemplation, prayer into beatific vision. To make it into the NT canon, Gos.Thos. floated too far off historical grounding into gnostic clouds; the Gospel of John did not. But Jesus Resurrectus speaks through both.