Some personal notes witnessing to my Elliott #2116

LIBERGELICAL SPIRITUALITY

Western Theological Seminary, 21Nov86, "Introduction to Spirituality" WES SL505.... While the below is propositional, note in this Thinksheet's title that the mode and mood are personal: I'm telling you what spirituality is in the only honest way anyone can, viz by & as personal witness.

1. Spirituality is the reach of roots for sky in response to the reach of sky for roots. The sky started it (so, in a Chinese image, the tree's roots are in the sky!): "We love Him because he first loved us" (1Jn.4.19), which I never hear/see without thinking of a very-low-IQ janitor who often radiantly repeated it on campus ½ c. and more ago--where, my 1st day there (9Sept35), I met my dear friend, your prof. in this course....which prompts me to say that long friendships are spirituality-friendly; and that we humans never do anything really important: the divine initiative is everywhere and always, and it is our lowly highest merely to respond to the creating, redeeming, consummating God.

2. Spirituality "knows" that, for what matters most, knowledge is "incompetent"--something I read today (18Nov86) longdistance to a sister whose birthday it is, and was 52 years ago when I wrote that in 1 of my 2 1934 diaries. Which prompts me to say that spirituality, in addition to being conversation with God (ie "prayer") and meditation on God and contemplation of God, is a continuous conscious communion with oneself in shishkebob skewering of the infant-child-youth-adult of the past. One of my daily devotional acts (in addition to reading the Bible in the original languages + one fresh translation in a modern language; and reading ten minutes in each of 4 or 5 meaty works, mostly classics) is the reading of my diary of some past year--in 1935, it was my 1934 diary (which has 1935 annotations); in 1986, it's my 1934 diary. What discoveries one can make when offering God two of one's lifestages at once! Eg: 1/3rd of my memory is accurate, 1/3rd distorted, and 1/3rd gone (ie amnesia: I just don't remember THAT at all!). Well, why? Why each 1/3rd? So why, when I was 16, did I conclude (though at the time I was science-oriented vocationally) that knowledge is "incompetent"? Because I had discovered it vis-a-vis my grandmother & dog (both dead) and vis-a-vis what my hormones were doing to me and vis-a-vis the answers the adult world was giving me to my meaning-of-life questions--which prompts me to say that if a question can be answered, that proves it's not important: important questions can only be responded to, not answered. Why's that? Because God is tricking us into freedom, without which we could not grow *imago Dei*, toward "the image of the stature of the fulness of Christ." We were made to become saints, which is French for "holy ones," and "holy" is our only word approximating a description of God's character: we are made by nature in the image of God, and we are being made by grace--to the extent we cooperate with the Spirit--into the character of God. Because this belief is central to my spirituality, I can say with full heart and mind that "saint" is the only thing that, in my 69 years, I am disappointed at not having become--a statement I hope you can unravel to know me, and yourself more than me.

3. As the Incarnation is God's self-revelation with hair & skin, the Spirit's defining of "saint" (ie spiritual human beings) is the Spirit's doing--so there's a silent joke implicit in this Thinksheet's effort, as well as a tinge of immodesty: I'm telling you what a saint is (though I don't really know), and I'm telling you I am one (though I'm hard put to prove it). Which brings me to another dimension of spirituality: trust in the divine forgiveness: the conviction that God loves me, and wills my good, more than I can ever love myself and will my own good. But God is no sentimentalist: my part of being God-forgiven is rectitude, coming clean, dealing honestly with fact and honorably with neighbor. If I'd rather not, God will not coerce me into further freedom or even further existence before or after death. (Conditional immortality was the most common early Christian conviction about the afterlife. Not inevitable resurrection, as in apocalyptic; certainly not reincarnation, as in the Indic religions; not universal disembodied blessedness, as in much current American religiosity, such as Eliz. Kubler-Ross.)

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4. Spirituality is the practice of valuing, most among the sensings, the sense of being called from Beyond to become more than we are. The word "aspiration" doesn't do it, though it's the bottomside of what I'm pointing to. I've a hunger for and excitement about conversion-and-call stories, biblical and extrabiblical, in and beyond our spiritual heritage (biblical-Jewish-Greek-Roman-Christian-European and "missionary"-indigenous). Dramatic heightening in this story-telling, of course: I'd remembered my own conversion as instantaneous (9Mar35), but my 1934-35 diaries show it to have been a year-long process.

5. "Libergelical" is probably the least euphonious word I've ever coined, but it expresses my spirituality's mix of evangelical & liberal convictions, my orthodox-open "way of seeing & living in the world" (my definition of a religion). God calls the adolescent in me to doubt my beliefs & the adult in me to doubt my doubts--to guard against gullibility & negativism, respectively, and to provide me with the twin lights of trust and critical consciousness with the twin courage of love & confrontation. I hear our Lord's "Leave all & follow me" and I'm half radical: I do my own "radical" (from the roots) thinking & take the consequences. Christian hypocrites claim to follow Jesus while leaving nothing; Christian fanatics leave all & follow Jesus; I enjoy the dis/comforts of being neither, but rather a responsible Christian according to my lights in this dark age of enlightenment, aware that my perceptions of truth & my practice of love are distorted by "interestedness," ego-incurvature (egocentricity, in disobedience to theocentricity).

6. Spirituality is parochial-ecumenical: "Honor thy father & thy mother," then also all humankind. Spirituality is biological: Honor thy & thy neighbor's genes and hormones. Spirituality, neurological: Honor thy & thy neighbor's brains-minds. Spirituality is historical & metahistorical: Honor thy & thy neighbor's traditions & meditations thereon. Spirituality is charismatic: Honor thy & thy neighbor's charisms, the special & individual-particular grace-gifts God's given for the blessing of community near & far. Spirituality is missional, a divine gift to be given through as well as to, in vulnerable obedience. Spirituality is celebrative, joyful-praiseful with the bright powers over & against the dark powers, grateful without ceasing for the gifts of life & love & light. Spirituality is care-ful about the creatures of God, about sustainable development (against ecocide, the declining quality of the biosphere & thus also of human life), about the shalom-ful tending of the garden of God. Spirituality is therapeutic, bent on touching, with the wounds of our Lord, the world's wounds of body-psyche-mind-spirit (It's midnight, & I've just come from a banquet of 120 healingminded Hospice volunteers who serve under the direction of my wife Loree; many spiritualities among them, but the will to healing runs through them all). "The child looks past the birthday gift / At his dear Father's smile": spirituality is sacramental, the world to it like a window to be looked through more than at. God smiles not only when giving gifts but also when receiving the gift of human deeds done to please God (in Hebrew, *mitzvot*): "Abram put his trust in the LORD, and because of this the LORD was pleased with him and accepted him" (Gn.15.6); "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (But I question Mt.Fox's "creation spirituality" except as a corrective to excessive redemption spirituality.)

7. Spirituality is attending unto God. What gets your attention gets you and is your god: daily you decide who your god is. Daily wanderings and betrayals call for daily repentances-turnings-returnings and weekly liturgical confession of sin as well as of faith (spirituality is communal, as support society as well as assembly of prayer & praise). The devil & Pres.Reagan are past masters of diversion, but both from time to time self-trapped in "terminological inexactitudes."

8. Only spirituality can speak to all four basic human wantings: to love, to be loved, to share, and to blossom (Jn.Walsh's "basic wishes," 30f, EVANGELIZATION & JUSTICE, Orbis/85). I add (1) my cross: heavenly/earthy as vertical opposites & habitual/adventurous as horizontal opposites, & (2) my cube: spirit/body/psyche/mind on one axis, God/nature-society-history on the other.

9. Spirituality sides with the holy against the sacred (become idols) and with the sacred against the sacrosanct & the sanctimonious.