

The less you are gotten by the internal GOD, the more you are gotten by some external god/dess. Spiritual emptiness, the hollow heart, is a vacuum human "nature" (to trope the saying from physics) "abhors"--on which Jesus tells a parable (Mt.12: 43ff / L.11.24ff)...My immediately previous Thinksheet dealt with the relation of privilege to \$ unprivilege. This one is on privilege vis-a-vis a freedom the \$ cannot give, viz freedom from self-imprisonment in addiction(s).

1. Inherited privilege--eg, dynastic power--stabilizes society by confining dreaming to intraclass activity: out-of-power (= out-of-privilege) classes do not dream of seizing power, so the social boat does not rock even though it contains egregious injustices. This is your typical human condition, the rare exceptions being here and there un/successful breakouts from below (revolts, revolutions, reformations, realignments). As a Biblical person, I identify naturally with pushes to increase justice at the expense of stability and peace, but also am a peace-lover & peace-maker. I like my own church's "struggle for j. & p." (the UCC Statement of Faith): an internal-present contradiction yearning for reconciliation--a double dynamic that cottons to no easy answers, cheap solutions, premature resolutions of issues of fairness, equity, justice. The four Reformation heritages of the UCC should protect me against addiction to "exodi," "ways out" that beguile, seduce, enthrall, addict the unwary by statement abuse and substance abuse and service abuse (partisanship to some cause that overclaims, overpromises, and underdelivers, yet dresses itself in divine robes & messianic hopes). Worst-case scenario (Loree & I had occasion to study in Guyana): Jim Jones became addicted to his megalomaniacal ego, and the 912 who died with him became addicted to him. By service he became privileged, and by abusing privilege he became addicted and addicting. Instead of an inherited stabilizing privilege, his was an earned destabilizing privilege.

2. "Privilege" is preference + law: its Latin components indicate that a "private *privus*" person is, in a particular society, advantaged structurally (ie by "law *lex, legis*"). We all have our preferences and consequent prejudgments ("prejudices"), "after our kind," birds of a feather and all that. But in all societies "some" are institutionally-customarily-structurally advantaged among the "all" (in the USSR at least as much as in the USA, eg). In Andy's case by birth, in Fergie's case by marriage: was the royal hoopla in London not many days ago\*an instance of innocuous-benign privilege? justified by the Brits' pride and enjoyment? Law variously, from nation to nation, encourages/punishes private capitalization, ie economic "privi-lege." Needing leadership, societies privilege, open doors for, chn. who show leadership potential--and also privilege some who've made a particular contribution to the society (eg, the post-WWII GI Bill of Rights). Affirmative action privileges some groups over others as a matter of corrective justice, disadvantaging individuals not in the privileged groups....So two things: (1) Privilege is structural rather than adventitious; (2) No moral content inheres in the word "privilege," though usu. the rhetorical context gives the word a negative connotation....My June/86 UNITED CHURCH NEWS letter (top of this Thinksheet's p.2) drew (to me, at least!) nothing but positive responses even though a number who read it predicted to me many negative responses. It's refreshing to know that many favor being honest to "privilege" and "preference." \* Aug/86.

3. We're all the same (species) and all different (individuals), and the two facts deserve equal attention vis-a-vis "privilege." Because we're all the same, nobody should be "privileged" over anybody else; but because we're all different, everybody should be "privileged" to develop and serve uniquely over everybody else (my doctrine of "mutual superior-

OVER

ity," as in "the mutual superiority of the sexes"). Academic degrees are granted "with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto" for the common good --but with objective + psychological "perqs" ("a privilege, gain, or profit incidental...") for the ego, relations, and body. (NB: If you spell it "perks" or "perques," you are abusing language, which however is only a venial sin.)

4. Butbutbut: This Thinksheet is about "privilege AND ADDICTION." Well, point is, any "addiction" (= "compulsive" activity) interferes with exercising one's privileges--which is bad when one would otherwise exercise one's privileges for the common good, and good when one would otherwise exercise one's privileges for self-aggrandizement only. Eg, I thank God when a mafia character becomes a "hopeless" alcoholic (though of course not as much as if said criminal were to become a saint). When I pray for my enemies, I'm thankful when they become addicted to some-thing/body or other, though of course not as much as were they converted to humanity, or moreso Christianity....Like "privilege," "addiction" ain't all bad. Of course it's all bad if I get hooked on some-thing/body that prevents my fulfilling, for the common good, the gifts God's given me. Which gets into what/whom you can get hooked on. Infatuations. Idolatries. Demons, with exorcism "indicated." Ditto for societies, nations, movements, ideologies. Note that here, LIBERATION means release to privilege, to using your advantages for the common good; and also the relegation of privileges you've no right, under God, to. Here's the essence, from within the heart, of "prophetic" living, "social action." My critical consciousness observes that much that passes for this high ground is only fancy footwork of individual-and-group ego, finally unbeneficial to either soul or society. Because of the idealistic-utopian component in our founding impulses, America is esp. vulnerable to this hybris.

5. Addiction-proneness is a protodisease pounded into me by Viktor Frankl while I was taping his 1952 lectures. A Jew delivered by the USA from a Nazi deathcamp, he was passionate to warn Americans of the vulnerability of the postmodern, secularistic, godless heart--the empty heart ("existential vacuum") Hitler inhabited with the demon of Aryanism. Hitler himself (as the Rev. Jim Jones long after him) became the addiction, the person-demon, of a whole people whom he led to death on the false promise of larger life. The US's public-school system leaves the heart empty, and to no good effect without confessing this fact does the NEA wring its hands over the crisis levels of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, eating disorders, dropout rates, child abuse, teen depression & suicide. Of course the PS establishment is not alone responsible for youth's anomie, but it should examine its emphases (instead of the 4 Rs, incl. religion/morals) on the relativity of right/wrong, making one's own decisions, the positive value of "open discussion" of "moral values," the superiority of situation ethics (in "values clarification") over traditional ethical paradigms, the psychosocial as the best kind of sense-making, the omnirelevance of the First Amendment in interpreting "rights," and the nonresponsibility of the PS for teaching morals (incl. the denial of chn.'s need for clear guidelines & strict enforcement).

### 'Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly'

Being a white, theist, Christian, Protestant male, I prefer my own kind. Does that mean that I, respectively in reverse, am a sexist, antiCatholic, antisemitic, antinontheist racist? Is there no distinction between preference and the *superiority* claim?

Sin is anything extended far enough in a straight line. All God's creatures went into and came out of Noah's ark "after their own kind;" preference for one's kind is natural. But when any preference is overextended into the superiority claim, the sin of hubris -- roundly damned by the ancient Jews, Greeks and Christians -- has been committed.

Guilt is a weak goal to change, but church types don't seem to know it. From all sides I'm pressured to feel guilty about my preferences, in sappy expectation that that's going to do something more than irritate me into praying that the church, my UCC, will become more intelligent and fair on "social issues."

No, I'm not in favor of letting sleeping dogs lie while birds of a feather flock together. I'm for the aggressive openness of majorities to minorities. But I'm against the false guilt of merely being in a majority and the bad faith on which the false guilt is based. The God of Love is not honored when we dishonor the God of Truth.

Willis Elliott  
Craigville, MA