

"GOD IS WHERE YOU FIND HIM."

2936 12.16.98

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L. Ellz. Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone/Fax 508.775.8008

Noncommercial reproduction permitted

A phonecall today from a California mystic whom I need identify, for the purpose of this Thinksheet, in no other way, as it was the way he identified himself when I inquired as to his religious praxis, specifically as to whether he ever goes to church, which (to judge from his "I'm a mystic") he doesn't.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

1 Thank you for phoning me today to wish me Merry Christmas! It was especially appreciated because, I presume, you yourself do not observe Christmas. (In your home, I saw no evidence of Christianity; but you did have up a portrait of Meher Baba.)

2 Excuse, please, this open letter, which treats you as a category ("Religion: Mysticism") rather than, as a personal letter would, a person. Be assured, however, that you are to me a person, a person beloved.

3 You never did go regularly to any church, so totally chilling out church-going has been no big deal for you. But when I asked about church-going, you said that some time ago you tried to get into a church for meditation & found it locked, so you went to a nearby bar instead & had a beer. Church locked, bar open. After remarking which, you spoke the title of this Thinksheet: "God is where you find him." Further comment on that anon.

4 I'm sending to the pastor of that church a copy of this Thinksheet, in hope that he'll consider trying to persuade his people to have the church unlocked in daytime. When I was pastor of that church, I found it a hard sell: The property protective association, viz, the trustees, had their eyes glued on the building (which was experiencing some vandalism) rather than on (1) the people locked out & (2) the bad-vibes symbolism of a locked church. That church was never locked when I was their pastor: I managed to persuade that the spiritual cost of locking the church was greater than the estimated annual cost of vandalism.

5 I was particularly saddened to see that church turning away intended drop-ins not only because of my having been their pastor but also because, in 1950, I designed the entry to attract drop-ins off Main Street: it's a huge semi-circle of glass with wide glass doors in the middle. Passersby can see inside the beautiful entrance to the prayer-&-meditation chapel; & on the main entrance, a simple sign reading "Please come in." (When you found the church locked, that sign probably was no longer there.)

6 That please-come-in entrance was a hard sell, for all the other members of the building committee said something like "All that glass would make the church look commercial."\* To which I replied Why? That is, why do commercial establishments have glass fronts? Answer, To attract customers. Does the church not want to do so? Must church architecture repel (be repulsive) rather than attract (be attractive)?

IRONY: In your state, an outdoor-movie-lot preacher got the idea that an all-glass church would be the nearest approximation of the open-air worship for which he'd become noted, so we got the so-called Glass Cathedral. I am glad to be able to report that of late, church-architectural innovations have broken the mold I put a crack in almost 50 years ago.

7 Open-air worship, now there's something that appeals to you. Not open-air public, church-corporate worship; but (1) no building & (2) no congregation: you have always been happiest alone in the words, in nature, where you most easily experience a sense of Presence, of the Beyond, of the Above, of the More-Than-We-Are. So far am I from denigrating your way of practicing the Presence that I would that every human being share it, though it's easier for some than others: God gave your soul just the right shape for it, & through it has made you gentle & beautiful within. But we're not forced to choose between private & public worship, are

\* But the Roman arch was/is a noncommercial touch.

we? The Christian way is to choose both, in **nature** praising God as Creator (eg, Ps.24.1: "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it") & in **church** praising God as Creator & Redeemer (eg, Heb.10.25: Meet for worship, "keep on encouraging one another"). You are right that "God is where you find him": Christian public (as well as private & family & small-group) worship aims to predispose to the finding & praising of God, whose love-story in Christ is narrated in Scripture, song, & prayers every Sunday morning. Find God in nature, yes; but in church we seek to find God in history, in God's own history of coming to us through mystics & prophets & saints but supremely as himself enfleshed in Jesus: "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory...full of grace and truth ....No one has ever seen God," but Jesus "has made him known" (John 1.14-18). I pray that you & yours will make this discovery.

8 When I asked whether you'd explored **Christian mysticism**, you mentioned four Christian mystics you & your commune have studied; but you've gone heavier on Eastern-hemisphere mysticism, so I've two suggestions: (1) That you go Web on "Mysticism, Christian" (& related topics); (2) That you study the two classics I'm sending you as gifts from my library (which, as an octogenarian, I'm gradually releasing to the less-aged). The books have been treasures of mine since I used them in a 1941 U. of Chicago Divinity School course titled "Mysticism" & taught by a seminal thinker & man of passion & compassion, Henry Nelson Wieman. Brief sketches:

Wm. Ralph Inge, CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM, Scribner's/1899/1933.....vi: "The *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* [the in-the-Christian-heart witness of the Holy Spirit] ...[is] the primary ground of faith"--as our own experience, & also through the witness of others....viii: "The mystical state in its purest form is just *prayer*, 'the elevation of the mind to God'."....Inge concentrated on "the intellectual basis of mysticism." For other aspects, here he suggests Evelyn Underhill, Baron von Hügel, & Rufus Jones--from all of whom I've drunk deeply. By 93 he'd concluded that the problems of eternity, human personality, and evil are intellectually insoluble. ..."The true mystic follows St.Paul in choosing as his ultimate goal the fulness of Christ, and not the emptiness of the undifferentiated Godhead."....118: Pantheism is an intellectual danger from mystical experience. It's an "error which leads to all manner of absurdities and even immoralities" and may "pass into pessimism or nihilism."....132: The West (& the Synoptics), time: the East (& Jn.), space....142: Roman Catholic natural/supernatural distinction abandons "the great aim which the earlier Christian idealists had set before themselves, namely, to find spiritual law in the normal course of nature, and the motions of the Divine Word in the normal processes of mind."....245: some mystics "have turned to the religious study of nature, and have found there the same illumination which the mediaeval ascetics drew from the deep wells of their inner consciousness."....314: "Mysticism has not succeeded in solving the problem of evil" & needs Jesus' Cross....332: "Every truth that we know is but the husk of a deeper truth....we shall one day behold our Eternal Father face to face, and know Him even as we are known."

Rudolf Otto, MYSTICISM EAST AND WEST (1st ed., Macmillan/32; 1923-24 Oberlin C. [Ohio] lectures, "expanded")...."Presupposes" acquaintance with his DAS HEILIGE (poorly trd. as THE IDEA OF THE HOLY); cp. also his DAS GE-FÜHL DES ÜBERWELTLICHEN (which I'll translate as THE SENSE OF TRANSCENDENCE)....Triple master: comparative religion, psychology of religion, & systematic theology; uses all three to break through Enlightenment rationalism, fortunately opening the way for globalism (world consciousness, with prospect of world peace) & unfortunately opening the way for neo-tribalisms & fanatical nationalisms (beginning, in his our country, with Nazism)....The Bible (Judaism & Christianity) holds mysticism & history in creative tension, as does the West's Master **Eckhart**, who teaches us to apply our mystical knowledge of God's Presence to (as the jacket says) "the practical redemption of men and the healing of humanity's wounds." The East's Master **Shankara**, on the other hand, teaches that "the world we live in...is a snare and a delusion and we must be quit of it speedily." The book is a comparison/contrast of these two reps, each of his own hemisphere....I add: S. collapsed history into mysticism: Marx collapsed mysticism into (dialectical-material) "history."