Ferraro says Reagon isn't a "good Christian"; Reagan hugs Falwell; we liberal evan-
gelicals are in disarray (split inwardly, and among ourselves, left/right on issues
whose variant resolutions subtend variant paradigms of paradise); and secularists,
who were good-humored about the pious motivations of their liberal-religious buddies
during "the movements," are fearful now that religious energy for political action is
more on the right than on the left....This thinksheet is two words for my colleagues
left of center: I've other words, at another time, for my colleagues right of center.
(I have colleagues, and opponents, all over the place. Most of my words, to whomever,
are "Yes, but....")

....a word on PLURALISM--Authentic pluralism encourages, or at least defends, the
vigorous witness of all parties, in the Miltonian belief that thereby truth, to which
all have only humble access and against which all from time to time are sinners, will,
in runs long if not also short, prevail. But increasingly, liberal Christians suppress
their Christian witness in the presence of Jews--a hypersensitive tendency that makes
savvy Jews nervous. This self-suppressing is done in the name of generosity and free-
dom, but it is ANTIpluralistic. The 15-22Aug84 CHRISTIAN CENTURY has an instance of
it: Robert McAfee Brown (whose on-paper lucidity I've long admired, and with whose op-
inions I generally agree): Since Am. Christians should now make their social witness-
action with Jews, the Christian-confessional language of (e.g.) Barmen is out: "During
the Vietnam years a number of us gathered to explore the possibility of creating a
kind of 'confessing church'...to say an unequivocal No to our government's foreign po-
licy. We decided not to do so, largely because we were already working closely with
many people in the Jewish community. Rendering our witness in the christological terms
of Barmen would have cut us off from them, and that was a price we were not willing to
pay. Today...we must find ways to work in concert with Jews who share our concerns,
rather than apart from them" and "all other persons of good will." Under this notion
of pluralism, then, should not Jews be gracious enough to suppress their Jewish witness
so as not to offend us? And should we not both self-suppress so as not to offend se-
cularists and persons of nonbiblical religions? Can verbal pussyfooting be an accep-
table component of authentic witness? Yes, we need a public language; but can it not
emerge while each group engages in vigorous witness through it own language? Would
we antiVietnamers have been less effective if, in addition to joint action of Chris-
tians and Jews, we Christians had made our own witness in our own language? And what
was the cost of the decision to suppress the Christian language--the cost in internal
motivation and in the alienation of fellow-Christians (who, not hearing the "sounds of
(Christian) Zion," concluded that liberal Christians had abandoned the Faith and it
would be necessary to create a Religious Right, a Moral Majority, a...)? And what were
the gains? Are Jews and Christians working now more together in social action that
would have been true if we Christians had started a 'confessing church' during Vietnam?
(A brilliant rabbi of high social concern told me he's reading CHRISTIANITY TODAY in-
stead of THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY because the latter "bores me with the same point of
view, and mainly the same language, as my own Reform publications.")....Some Christians
believe that it's not only not necessary but actually wrong for Christians to clump to-
gether for social protest and action. While Brown is emphatically not one of them, he
votes with them in the sense that the verbal base of social action should be nonChris-
tian. Curious bedfellowing! The outcome of washing out the particularity of a group's
utterance in the interest of cooperating with and not offending other groups is not
pluralism but secularism, the "secular humanism" the Religious Right says has taken
over the public schools and the media. In the political dimension, this humanism tends
to be class-analytic (i.e., marxian) in its thinking and speaking, a tendency seductive
because (1) it provides a sense-making way of viewing social power/anguish, (2) it's
lucid about who are the good/bad guys, and (3) it's swift in coming up with scenarios
for getting from (the social-awful) here to (the social-desirable) there. In recent
years, Brown has so sold out to this social analytic (at the ideological heart of "lib-
eration theology," on which basis the Pope condemned it last week) that, having a com-
mon theoretical base for working with nonChristians, he feels less need for common
specifically Christian social action. His own way to go: I don't condemn him for it,

over

but I cannot fellow-travel with him. And I'm distressed at how easily so many of my friends go along with him uncritically--as so many Americans, disadvantaged by Reagan, go along with him largely for the extraneous reason that he's a good guy. Much of his recent writing strikes me as a liberationistic form of the Orwellian Newspeak and Doublespeak his CENTURY article rightly blasts in current Washington patois. This leads into my second word in this thinkinksheet,

....**a word on ABSOLUTISM**--When a paradigm such as class-analysis is so "bought" as to move persuasively with an energy of its own, rival paradigms seem increasingly not only erroneous but evil; rival ways of seeing issues and proposing solutions seem false-hearted as well as wrong-headed. When this happens in a soul, that soul has lost all defenses against arrogant blindness. The "nicest people" say vicious things about opponents' motives, behavior, proposals. Their thinking becomes absolutistic; gray-scale is lost to black-and-white; better/worse becomes good/evil; pragmatic arguments feel like craven subversion of "obvious" right/wrong. I'm talking about pathology: I grant that all healthy souls occasionally confront a situation (a *status confessionis*, in Brown's article) calling for NO-saying, "Here I stand" absolutely against something I'm persuaded is wrong and evil. What's tough, for us Christians and all of good will, is to know when, and on what issues, to take this stand. Instances:

1. Catharism, beginning with Donatism. Christians and churches are to be pure, excluding the impure as wrong and evil. Studying these movements in Christian history provides a coign of vantage for vieweing current appearances, on the Right and on the Left, of this uncompromising, unyielding, dogmatic mentality with its fallout of blessings and banes. In U.S. church history, prohibition and, before it, antislavery: slaveholding and drinking were impure activities (whatever else was to be said about them). The locus of this purity sanction is not the neocortex but the lower brain: that's why it's so powerful for weal and woe. (Hitler was a world-class master of this sanction.) In movements, certain words and slogans become impure; "capitalism" and "communism" are verbal signals of impurity to ideologues and their "running dogs" on, respectively, Left and Right. Beginning with an ecumenical council in AD 405, "the Church" has condemned--but often practiced, as in the Inquisition!--catharism, and this thinksheet is anticatharistic.

2. Antiracism as an absolute is rhetorically powerful but analytically weak: we should use its powers and compensate for its weaknesses. Is there anything good about Teutonism (German race-pride) or Jewish pride or Americanism? Is there some non-obscene way, politically, to prevent the nonwhite swamping of the numerically inferior Afrikaans and their culture (or is that goal itself impure, obscene, degrading, as many Christians against apartheid seem to be saying)? The whole political spectrum on "the race issue" in the world is shot through with moralisms and legalisms, dogma-based quick fixes arrived at by straight-line "thinking." KKK, ACLU. On both sides, non-negotiability and the absolute-surrender demand. World gatherings of Christians finesse this whole thicket of issues by simplistic pronouncements romanticizing/anathematizing--e.g., Brown on Aug82 World Alliance of Ref. Churches: "either Christ or *apartheid*, but not both." Friends who see nothing but either/or here anathematize me as a regressive-chastened liberal or....but I have never imagined "race" as a "problem" composable by reason and soluble by politics: I have called and do call for honesty, humility, and meritocracy (incl. the removal of impediments to the discovery and release of human gifts).

3. Ludditism of all sorts--opposition to conception control and abortion, handgun control, antinukism--is based on the illusion that what "man" can release, "man" can control. Where's the historical evidence? Rather, technological Frankensteins have a life of their own and seem to operate more on the Greek Dike-Moira view of history and on the biblical hybris-punishment/intervenion understanding of God's historical working than on Enlightenment "can do." Pandora's box and the Jinn's bottle are more realistic than "ban the bomb." We are doomed to live or die with our products, and we can project almost nothing of action-effects from their threat-use (e.g., was it, in its effect on "the powers" in the USSR, good or bad that Reagan's "We start bombing in five minutes" got loose?). The great powers act today as yesterday, nervously and stupidly at home and abroad; Jesus assumed that only divine intervention could save us. I hope he was wrong, but I fear he wasn't.