EAST/WEST PING-PONG IN THE EMERGING PLANETARY SOUL

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ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone 508.775.8008
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Every since the West made technically, managerially, & financially possible the world's first Parliament of Religions (Chicago, 1893), and provided the spiritual impetus for same--proving manifoldly the West's overwhelming superiority, though to do so was not the point--planetary ping-pong has been going on in the human soul. As I write this, I'm occasionally glacing at a shelf in my study on which are the two volumes of that Parliament's papers, papers in which one can observe East/West hands being extended to each other, but even more, balls being driven into each other's court....Because West penetrated East (navigation, Christian missions, trade, the military), the East's cultures (India and the Sinic lands) developed "neo-" forms of their religions (**neo-Hinduism, neo-Buddhism, neo-Taoism**). The reverse syncretism, East flowing West, didn't get a good start till after WWII. Today we have, in the West, varieties of **neo-Christianity** and even some **neo-Judaism**....Catholic paleontologist Teilhard taught us to expect, as an evolutionary emergent, global consciousness, what here I'm calling the planetary soul, toward (his version of Jesus' Second Coming) the Omega Point. I call myself, as one of these souls, "orthodox (Christian) open (to all witnesses from anywhere anytime)" & "evangelical (Christian) radical (seeking all roots & their reach)."....The rest of this Thinksheet is on open letter to another planetary soul, a Westerner. The West's two major religious fissures, the Christian/Jewish & the Protestant/Catholic, in intermarriages, tend to produce sterile hybrids, offspring of neither parent's religious praxis. True of this planetary soul, who as an infant was both circumcised as a Jew & baptized as a Christian. At 16 he fled Eastward (to a neo-Hindu guru), escaping his multiproblem home. He's religion-saturated, betimes on the verge of conversion-commitment East, or West (Judaism or Christianity). He's adept at criticizing every religion & at dreaming of a religionless future in which all people love "God." He's as one who, invited to a buffet, criticizes every food offered--and eats nothing, though he nibbles at a few neo-Hindu dishes (esp. the concept of "the realized soul" as the human ideal).

Dear_____,

Disingenuously, you attack my religion, then criticize me for defending it, for being "apologetic," for being "an apologist for Christian history and original sin." A true apologetic includes polemic, so expect this letter to be a counterattack (and you needn't worry that I'll accuse you of defending yourself if you do).

1. There's a subtle sin that tempts those in the superior position to be overgenerous. The sin has a two-forked tail: The superior behaves patronizingly to the inferior, and lazily neglects the defense of the superior position. (I'm using superior/inferior nonpejoratively, to mean simply the more/less successful or the dominant/subdued--eg, men/women, whites/nonwhites, rich/poor, Christians/Jews, West/East.) Both aspects of this sin have vicious effects. The underdog, unchecked, develops a howling self-righteousness against the topdog (to use Fritz Perls' favorite analogy for this phenomenon); & the topdog says "Bite me again, and harder! I deserve it!" I believe in kindness, in generosity; but I hate & fear sentimentality & pretense. When antiabortionists call abortion "murder" & preach "choose life" (abusing, thus, two scriptures) & are not attacked for their violence to the Bible, next thing you know they'll be committing various forms of violence against facilities whose services include abortion. How this caveat applies to the burden of this letter, you are about to see.

2. You say "Jesus never intended Christianity." Except for "never," every word in that sentence is a weasel. What "Jesus"? The Gospels' Jesus, my Jesus, the resurrected Lord, formed his disciple band into a continuing community, whether or not you call it "Christianity." As for "intended," it's an historical anomaly to say that anybody in the past "intended" the present (unless you are talking in the very small, such as the probate of a will). Further, the historical Jesus certainly intended, as in the (kiddush) Lord's Prayer, the coming of God's "Kingdom" (reign, rule) & the honoring (santifying) of God's name throughout the world, & some aspects of that emerging reality have already appeared in Christianity (which, you yourself grant, has carried the name of the biblical God throughout the world, as "tribal" [again, your word] Judaism was & is unable to do). And once again: Since revelation is full of surprises, why should the preresurrected Jesus have intended Christianity for it to be true, enthroning him as Lord & understanding this as an enthronement divinely begun at his baptism?

3. You find "thousands, or at least hundreds, of contradictions in the Gospels." That's an ignorant violation of genre. In making a specific argument, one can be held to logical consistency & scored for inconsistencies, rightly (in this context) called contradictions. But when a storyteller or poet makes a number of approaches to a reality, and there are differences among the approaches, it would be an error to refer

to those differences as contradictions. Further, wouldn't you be suspicious that some apologetic-polemic redactor had been at work if all the details of all the Resurrection stories in all the Gospels fitted together as though pieces of a jigsaw puzzle? Rather, the very roughness of the materials witnesses that something overwhelming, exploding language itself, happened, reversing the disciples' expectation that Jesus would stay dead till the historically remote "resurrection of the just."

4. You've fallen into an easily understandable projection. You say "Grow up--you're not 16 anymore." Meaning I should abandon Christianity & join your neo-Hindu cult (though you refuse to call it either neo-Hindu or a cult). We'll, I am still 16, as you are. My age-16 conversion to Jesus holds, grows, is a daily occasion of thanksgiving to God, of peace, of joy; & your age-16 "sitting at the feet of" (ie, becoming a disciple) that guru still holds. About 85% of humans die in the religion into which they were born; my guess is the percentage would be about the same for those whose first-religious-love-&-commitment occurred in the late-puberty, early-adolescence period. The difference between us is that I acknowledge my age-16 conversion, you deny yours.

5. You say "Jesus died young, too young to have become, as was my guru, a completely evolved, realized, soul." Your baseline here is the Hindu-Buddhist concept of the "realized" (in "neo-" form, "evolved") soul. You couldn't criticize me for failing to become a physician: I never intended to become a physician. Far from being into self**realization**, Jesus was into self**denial** for himself (Philippians 2^{1-8}) & for his disciples (Mt.16^{24} M.8^{34} L.9^{23}). To say that he was into selfrealization, & failed because of the tragedy of his early death, is ignorant or (as such gossamer evils as "The Protocols of Zion") vicious--or are you into another one of your koans?....Further, you skip over the Incarnation: God (you might say) "devolved" into Jesus, whose mission did not "involve" "evolving." He lived Torah according to his understanding of it, & calls on his disciples to live Torah according to his understanding of it (the NT being the communicating & evolving of that understanding)....Against your bad news that humans must ACHIEVE something (by gnosis, gnostic progress, "selfrealization," "the ladder of perfection" [to use a phrase from a Christian version of same]), the "gospel" (Anglo-Saxon for "good news") is that instead we are called to RECEIVE something (God's forgiveness, by repentance & faith--see Pure Land Buddhism, a neo-Buddhist version, esp. Al Bloom's Harv.PhD on Shinran).

6. Bloom, ex-West, is now a worldclass Buddhist leader who wrote me he's glad he gave up "the burdens of history." You Easterners are all the same in your putting down of history. Today I got from you the accusation that I'm deluded by "the maya of historical blindness," and the antiWestern affirmation that "we are all of us God's Redeemer." You continue to prate of "the shift from the historic to the cosmic" (a Hindu-Buddhist missionary phrase in the West--a sectarian reading of the plain fact of a shift from the local to the planetary, a historical shift). East (you) & West (I) preach reciprocal mayas, the "illusion" of the one being the "reality" of the other. I am ecumenical in holding that the East is wrong; you are sectarian in believing that the West is stupid.

7. You pervert the Christian doctrine of "original" goodness/sin, quoting a Christian pervert for support (Matthew Fox, an East-influenced religious celibate whose "original blessing" is his romantic recovery of "nature"). You speak of "the lunacy of original sin" (rather parallel with N.Eng.Transcendentalism of the 1830s onward: you often sound so much like Mary Baker Eddy,a Boston "Brahmin" neo-Hindu). Original goodness/sin is a profound way of speaking of the paradoxical aspects of human nature--our essential goodness, our existential evil (including the fact that every one of us has four or five defective genes: we are all of us God's defective, damaged, rebellious children, in need of divine grace through repentance and faith).

8. You accuse me of being "proud of Western technology," & I confess: I am. I am reading-blind in one eye; but were it not for Western technology (eyeglasses), I'd've been reading-blind all my life. You're Taoist enough to know you have to take the evil with the good: the flipside of the West's mayhem to humanity & the planet is the equally impressive good we've accomplished as earth's most successful civilization--call it "Christian" if you want to (as you do when in a mood to condemn it).