

MOOD, MIND, & MYSTERY

She awakens Sunday morning in a self-contented mood, doesn't dress, rationalizes not going to church, & muses on the mysterious possibility of something better--thus touching all three dimensions of this Thinksheet's title before lunch.

"She says, 'But in contentment I still feel / The need of some imperishable bliss.' / Death is the mother of Beauty; hence from her, / Alone, shall come fulfillment of our dreams / And our desires."

--stanza 5 of Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning" (1923)

This Thinksheet says we're **tripartite**, each of us a conscious compound of feelings (passions & moods), cognitive process (reason, "mind" in the narrow sense), & mystery (limits to our self-, world-, God-knowledge). And we're **triangular**, able to see our three "parts" in their interrelations---e.g., our passions subvert & distort our reasoning, which our sense of mystery transcends.

1 So often I've heard "I don't understand the Trinity." Often I respond "The situation is even worse than you think: you don't even understand the trinity that is yourself." In a 3.15.01 NEW YOUR TIMES interview, Episcopal novelist Madeleine L'Engle made a virtue of this necessity: "I don't even want to 'understand' the mystery." Refreshing statement in a psycho-hermeneutical culture whose ruling cultural elite psychologize away all mystery.

2 In my poetry reading this a.m. I came upon these Sam Johnson lines intertwining our three dimensions: "...when the sense of sacred presence fires, / And strong devotion to the skies aspires, / Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind, / Obedient passions, and a will resigned." The call to prayer then spells out further what's to be prayed for: love, patience, faith--"goods" with which "celestial Wisdom calms the mind, / And makes the happiness she [i.e., the mind unaided by divine grace] does not find."

3 In a laity-&-clergy theological discussion group a few days ago, a lay person asked "How can the Father & the Son both be God if the Son talks to the Father?" My response analogized from the trinity (within each human consciousness) to the Trinity: "You carry on conversations within yourself, & you're made on the model (in the "image") of God, who carries on conversations within himself." An ancient Ionian philosopher said that if frogs had gods, their gods would be frogs. He was a mocking atheist, & (in my opinion) had it right: deity & devotee are a continuity of communion. (Also, he had it wrong: we're not frogs; further, we must assign to mystery how frogs are related to *our* deity, whom we hold to be *the* God of frogs & everything & everybody.

4 **Ontologically**, we are trinities because "image" creatures of the Creator-Trinity. **Historically**, our awareness of ourselves as trinitarian "persons" or "selves" and even "individuals" in the Western sense can be justifiably said to begin with Augustine's reflections on the Trinity. The Christian missionaries were accused of imposing their religion on the natives: the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a Western psychosocial paradigm, continues the "imposition" (as, e.g., some Muslim & Sinic states are saying). (I'm for both nonviolent "impositions.")

5 Each of the three dimensions or "parts" that make each of us up *can be made a religion of*. And has been! "Romanticism" is one of the names for the religion of feelings; "rationalism," of mind as reason; "superstition," of mystery. Or these names: pentecostalism, liberalism, New Age. Why the underlinings? Because I'm about to tell you a story of this type of religion:

My father was Unitarian-inclined, but my mother refused to go with him to any Unitarian church. When I became UCC, they settled for that. But in my father's papers I found a piece of Unitarian propaganda, No.246 in the American Unitarian Association's free pamphleteering ("Published for Free Distribution"), by a man my father often referred to, Chas.W.Eliot, for 40 years president of Harvard, father of "Dr.Eliot's Five-Foot Shelf" (the 50 vols. of the Harvard Classics). Titled "The Religion of the Future" (& published 1909 [34th printing, 5.38] it details "**a new religion**," socalled on most of its 26pp (& for me reminiscent of my claim, in 1995 when published, that The New Century Hymnal was captive to "a new religion"). Those "Harvard Classics"? When I was growing up, they had a prominent place in our home library; & still have in our home today.

Eliot's essay "The Religion of the Future" deserves a close look today:

1 He foresaw--eight years before the Russian Revolution & three years before "The Fundamentals," the pamphlets classically drawing the line between fundamentalism & modernism--that his liberal (vs. "conservative") religion would win the mainline churches (24): "The new religion will make but slow progress, so far as outward organization goes. It will, however, progressively modify the creeds and religious practices of all the existing churches, and change their symbolism and their teachings concerning the conduct of life."

2 Though published only eight years short of a century ago, "RF" (this essay) is astonishingly fresh to read. If published today, only a few well-informed & highly perceptive readers could date it as dated. That's how successful Eliot's liberalism has become in capturing the mind of our cultural elite both secular & religious. Evangelical historian Geo. Marsden has made it his specialty to document the progress of this success in academe--esp. in his now widely known THE SOUL OF THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief (Oxford/94). As in Eliot's essay, "Liberal Protestant theology had already located salvation primarily in [my underlining] social advance and so had removed any basis of maintaining a distinction between church and society," says GM. "The liberal Protestant vision of a united culture under Christ" became the secular spirit of unity, diversity, multiculturalism, tolerance--with no mention of Christ--on which note, in CE's last ¶, that Jesus is only an epexegetic add-on:

"This twentieth-century religion is not only to be in harmony with the great secular movements of modern society--democracy, individualism, social idealism, the zeal for education, the spirit of research, the modern tendency to welcome the new, the fresh powers of preventive medicine, and the recent advances in business and industrial ethics--but also in essential agreement with the direct, personal teachings of Jesus, as they are reported in the Gospels. The revelation he gave to mankind thus become more wonderful than ever."

3 CE's utopianism is disturbingly like that of Marx. This in the ¶ preceding the long quotation in this Thinksheet's §2: "With educated people," the afterlife has disappeared. "The modern mind craves an immediate motive or leading, good for today on this earth. The new religion builds on the actual experience of men and women, and of human society as a whole. The motive powers it relies on have been, and are, at work in innumerable human lives; and its beatific visions and its hopes are better grounded than those of traditional religion, and finer--because free from all selfishness, and from the imagery of governments, courts, social distinctions, and war." On p23, this sadly smells communist: The new religion "will teach only such uses of authority as are necessary to secure the cooperation of several or many people to one end; and the discipline it will advocate will be training in the development of cooperative good-will."

4 The essay anticipates today's most radical inclusive language. The "new religion," being "universal," avoids provincial expressions which would hinder world unity in religion. God is "the Great Spirit" (22), but without (7) "the Hebrew anthropomorphic representations" which were "carried in large measure into institutional Christianity"; not judge or king or Pharaoh or emperor or patriarch. "The nineteenth century has made all these conceptions of deity look archaic and crude." 20: Away with "the numerous deities revered in the various Christian communions,--God the Father, the Son of God, the Mother of God, the Holy Ghost, and the host of tutelary saints. All these objects of worship have greatly moved the human soul, and have inspired men to thoughts and deeds of beauty, love, and duty. Will the new religion do as much? It is reasonable [!] to expect that it will. The sentiments of awe and reverence, and the love of beauty and goodness, will remain, and will increase in strength and influence."

5 Transcendence is gone: CE's deity is immanent only. Divine justice is not a productive idea: God is love. Atonement is nonsense, as there's no deity to placate: God is love, remember....I'm space-frustrated. The essay deserves an extensive critical analysis for the light it can shed on religion today.