

Today I had a conversation with a beautiful soul imprisoned in a confused mind. At the moment, his intellectual struggle to understand--a struggle that can, and therefore should, work in tandem with the soul's eagerness to love--is depreciating mystery (and therefore openness to reality) & community (and therefore openness to intimacy, solidarity, unity). This soul-condition of so-called modern & postmodern "man" is so common a self-deprivation that I'm moved to remark it for the length of a Thinksheet.

1. The Bros. Grimm have latterly come in for both appreciation (Bruno Bettelheim's THE USES OF ENCHANTMENT: THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF FAIRY TALES, Random House/75) and depreciation (eg, by feminists, who oppose fairy tales as giving a bad rap to females--as Plato opposed myths as doing ditto to the gods, to The Good; & by pedagogists, who find distasteful the tales' attention-holders, frightening the hell out of kids by blood-&-guts terror, said by said to have not a purgative but a paranoidizing effect on children, esp. as now already terrified by nuketalk in schools)....In BB's index, Sleeping Beauty comes in for 9 reff. It's an early-puberty tale of developmentally necessary introversion, turning within before once again, & with higher competence, turning outward. (Coincidentally & in another connection, this morning I bumped into an early-adolescent, age-15 comment, at the end of my '33 diary, about my age-14 diary: "This Diary was read during the Year of 1934 for the sake of the comparison of progress. This reference (day by day) was of very great interest and benefit." An entry near the beginning of my age-14 diary says "Listened on radio to three stories"--for which radio was, & still is, far superior to television. Our souls are shaped by two potter-angels, viz story & song.)

2. This Thinksheet's THESIS: The two redeemer-angels are self-sacrifice (as in the case of Jesus, for me the par-excellence Redeemer) & art (as Sartre, for one, asserted, dim view though he took of our human potential for truth-meaning). On the esthetic side, the artist assumes that beauty, which is "revelatus" (open, visible for all to see), is also "absconditus" (hidden, shy, inner, to be coaxed forth, loved out into the open, kissed awake--as in the case of Sleeping Beauty). Hang in with that last analogy: I, you, have the power, the gift, the opportunity, the responsibility, to kiss awake the inner beauty of our fellow human beings. We must believe it is there, put there by the Lord of All Being & Beauty: we can believe it is there, for we have seen it come forth time & again, & we continue to rejoice in fact-&-fiction stories of its coming forth....I can still hear my long-dead father quoting Shakespeare on this: Brutus says, "Yonder stands Cassius. He hath an inner beauty that makes me ugly." (Or do I have these two guys switched? Why cares? I'm too lazy to check the reference.)\*

3. Two things I would note here as going on when a soul's beauty is kissed awake, ie becomes public: (1) All the angels, all of good will in heaven & on earth, rejoice & sing a hallelujah chorus; & (2) One more weight is added, in the struggle for souls, on the side against the intellectual hangup "How can you believe in God when there is so much evil in the world?" The rejoinder here is "How can you not believe in God when humanity's inner beauty can be kissed into conscious communion with the world's outer beauty?" No, I'm not demeaning intellectual honesty. But honesty to what? To paradigm conformity (eg, rationalism)? To intellectual beauty? To feedback-empirical truth (pragma)? To the short & long wisdom within the human record on this planet? To love as you've known it & long for it?

4. Back to that conversation this morning. The man has everything about  
over

him converted to the Christian faith & church except his mind, and he (honorably) cannot be convinced to check that at the church door. Not that anybody's trying to get him to do so (as he wouldn't be joining a fundamentalist or authoritarian congregation). He brightened up when I said "Sing what you can't say" & told him a story from out of my life. In the home of Ernest Cadman Colwell, then dean of the U. of Chicago Divinity School, I was conversing with that old world-class master of the NT Text, Kirsopp Lake, on this very point of intellectual hindrances to faith. He told me of his divinity-school roommate, who was to become (in my opinion) this century's worthiest occupant of the See of Canterbury, highest office in the Anglican Communion, Wm. Temple. Temple, refused ordination because of his rejection of the Virgin Birth, wailed dejectedly to Lake, who said "Try again in six months, & tell them you can sing it though you can't honestly say it." That he did, & got ordained.....Many today are impeded from Christian faith & the Christian church because of their neo-naive historicistic ("what actually happened?") notion of truth. Many of them can be helped by a postmodern understanding of "history" & "truth." Eg, "what happened" the first Christmas, our Christian faith says, was something at the heart of biblical faith, viz "immanu-el," Hebrew for God-come-among-us in us (in Christian faith, in the person of Jesus, however one may manage that metaphysically). But the 19th-c.-German-&-since historicistic question "what ACTUALLY happened?" disintegrates into nonsense: "actually" means here "scientifically, verifiably," & the ancients weren't interested in, indeed weren't aware of, that modern-science-created question. If we are to appropriate "prescientific" truths & traditions, we shall have to doubt our doubts, going on to recover a holistic consciousness integrating love, goodness, holiness, beauty, & truth in our inner & outer lives. As the early adolescent moves inward in preparation for the next stage, millions among us are moving inward--"New Age," et al--in preparation for the next stage of our cultural development; & we Christians, if we use all the resources God has provided us, can model, be a vanguard for, this next stage of culture-&-world history....(\* Wow, I've garbled a couple of quotes. "Yonder stands Cassius. He hath a lean and hungry look. I like him not," & "He hath an inner beauty that makes me ugly." My garbling shows the problem, & the potential.)

5. It's an old saw, worthy of enduring, as it has: Your body's relative beauty at birth is God's doing; at 40, it's God's & yours. We both cooperate with, & resist, having our inner beauty kissed forth. As we cooperate, the inner beauty appears in our bodies--our faces, our body-language--as well as in our lives. Again: The beauty we work together with God to kiss forth from others, that beauty becomes reflected in our own faces, bodies, lives. Pressed to define pornography, a member of Congress declared "I know it when I see it." So too with the inner beauty outered: we know it when we see it, be the body ever so gnarled by years & labor. She who was to become Mother Teresa was, everybody would say, a beautiful young woman: who is of soul so dead as to see her as less beautiful now?....I have things to say to myself when trying to kiss forth someone's inner beauty. One of these is this: "Willis, remember: you're in the face-lifting business." Another (a pickup from Socrates): "Willis, remember: you're a midwife."

6. Many scriptures, not only our, spring to mind for this. "Awake, sleeper! Rise from death, & Christ will shine on you!" (Ephesians 5.14) Since we open our eyes upon awaking, the photeric metaphor dominates: "The Word...brought light to humanity. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never put it out." (John 1.4f)