

YOU ~~MAY BE~~ YOUR ENEMY'S FRIEND, BUT

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

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History's prize for influencing toward acting on the possibility expressed in this title must go to Jesus: "Love your enemies" (Mt. 5.44; L.6.27,35). This Thinksheet, however, concentrates on the actuality expressed in this title. Here, too, Jesus gets the prize, & for an instruction as shocking as is "Love your enemies": "hate his father & mother" (L.14.26; softer in Mt., 10.37: "cares more for father & mother")....(Inclusive-language note: The Latin of L. can be read with no masculine: "Whoever...hate father & mother" (the "whoever," *quis*, being common gender). Greek, too, has common-gender "whoever," *tis*, but goes masc. with "his," *autou*; so the Greek is even more masc. than our Eng. "his," which is (was?!) common-gender. Neither Lat. nor Gk. does what Eng. does to achieve common gender, viz, uses the pl. "they/them/their": "Whoever... hate their father & mother." But the anarthrous (no-article) translation is both inclusive-language & better Eng., there being no question as to whose father & mother: "Whoever...hate father & mother.")

OCCASION: Somebody just tried to take me over, & I was polite enough--Christian enough?--to suppress the urge to laugh in his face. It was esp. risible the way he put it--something like "You've done your thing, Christianity, for seven decades; how about doing my thing, _____, the next ten years?" He asked me to give up my central life-commitment & accept his, which (of course) he claimed to be beyond mere religion....In vain did I try to divert his attention to what we could agree on (ie, the unitive: he insisted on directing my attention to our differences (ie, the divisive--he reminding my of something I'd forgotten, viz, that I had provided the terms "unitive" & "divisive" in something I'd written, whence he'd picked them up.)....My behavior was irenic (my preferred mode, though my enemies would deny it), but it might have been polemic: I might have shifted into the evangelistic gear & tried to take *him* over, trying to get him to give up his "false" good news for my "true" good news, with mutual monolog as the almost certain result.

My THESIS is this: How hard it is for a human being to shift from the divisive gear to the unitive gear! "Whence come wars," saith the Epistle of James; and divorces; and broken friendships, wrecked careers, anguished hearts and lonely lives. The parallel truth is that those who are peace-&-quiet-loving (as opposed to being peace-loving) find it hard to shift gears from the unitive (warm-fuzzy, cool-mystical, or cold-philosophical) to the confrontational-aggressive-divisive; & these are trouble-makers for those who consider truth, justice, love worth battling for, becoming "unChristian" (as they put it) about. In short (as the case of Jesus shows dramatically), the peace-&-quiet-loving are enemies of the peace-loving. But back to my thesis....

1. The more practice you have in each gear, the freer you are to shift--as the occasion may suggest--from either to the other. Becoming a specialist in either gear is bad news, for your behavior is appropriate only half the time. See the quiet humor in the thumb-nail moral-portraits of Jn. Bunyan's & Wm. Law's writings--& those of Chas. Dickens.

2. When you try to be your enemy's friend, you so strengthen your good will that ill will will not defeat it on those occasions when your integrity demands that you be an enemy of your friend: your resistance to your friend will not be driven by the desire to injure but only by the desire to assert, to affirm what you feel you must over against your friend. Not unconditional, the friendship is on condition of partnership in freedom, in self-&-other yes/no-saying. If the condition is not met, the covenant is broken & the relationship is--worse than useless--a waste.

3. The divine love yearns, more than we can, for reconciliation, for a fresh start in re-pentance (where appropriate) & mutual respect. \

4. God is our enemy/friend, as appropriate to our good. Because that is the divine nature, it is also our God-derivative human nature. The sentimental notion that God is not our enemy deprives the divine-human relationship of moral content & intent, just as an only-summer-sunshine friendship is superficial & short-lived.

5. While the fact of enmity in the divine-human & human-human relationships is tragic in the senses of painful &, as violating our ideal for relationships, profoundly disturbing of inner peace & joy, much of our American problem here rests on (1) our underappreciation of the force & function of the tragic in human life, & (2) our overappreciation for (a) the human interpersonal potential ("intimacy") & (b) the human social potential ("community")--ironically, in spite of Americans' extreme difficulties with both, intimacy being considered too expensive of ego & community being considered too expensive of self.

6. My friend/enemy, an antiChristian, twisted to his own meaning my words in my intro (xxii) to Mel Yosso's TRANSCULTURE (Transculture/80): "When I see a sign reading 'Jesus saves,' I say to myself, 'Yes, I believe that, but how? How, when his name, or any other, is a divisive as well as a unitive force not only because of the chasms between the traditional religions but also because of the alienation of hundreds of millions of people from the traditional religions?" (My underlinings, for this Thinksheet.) In his reading of this, my friend/enemy confused a statement of fact (mine) with his conclusion on value. He uses "transculture" in only one sense of trans-, viz, going beyond (& leaving behind) the particular religions (which are the kernels of cultures); I use it in that sense & in the sense of interrelating--as I say of metaphor (xix) that it is "literally, a space in which persons can 'carry' their truth 'across' to each other." Thus, as to the first meaning, I reject the parenthesis: for me, transculture is going beyond but NOT leaving behind; and "over-arching" or "undergirding" are better metaphors than "going beyond."

The context of my statement compels against my friend/enemy's version "Jesus is divisive so lets set him aside" & requires that my "how" ("Jesus saves'...how?") be read not as "how could anybody believe Jesus saves?" but as "Jesus does indeed save, but how, given the hurdles?" My "how?" was not dismissive but deliberative. Further, in the same paragraph I refer to transculture as my way of becoming not less but more Christian: "Both the sacred among themselves, and the sacred and the secular, need a sphere and process for mutual confrontation in the interest of truth and love and human surviving and thriving on the earth. In helping develop and use such a sphere and process, I am not less but more of a man, a religious person, a Christian."

7. Yesterday in Boston I was the commentator on the papers read at the annual meeting of the Northeast Section of the American Academy of Religion, Division of Religion/Christianity in America. Boston College's Jn. Willis, SJ, reported on vol.4 of his systematic theology, just out. After the discussion, I began my commentary by saying "You have the advantage of being a double outsider. When you were a Prot. minister, you were an outsider to Ro. Catholicism; now you are an outsider to Protestantism." "Rather," said he, "I am an insider to both." "Which," said I, "is the other side of the truth I stated." And we all laughed, celebrating this wonderful God-given power to be inside outsiders & outside insiders--cultural & transcultural....And through the day I was the companion of Amos Wilder, who, pushing 94, is a paragon of scholarly Christian depth & breadth.